



Communicating the Global Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis of the News Portals on “COVID-19”

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Abstract

World Health Organization declared 2019 Novel Coronavirus as a Global Pandemic, quivered human existence, millions of lives lost, altered way of life, and created a new normal. Global concern is to slow down and contain the spread of disease through dissemination of information, promotes wider understanding, and encourages more informed decision-making at all levels. Drawing on this, paper examines pattern of news reporting, weightage of content by identifying frequency, during early phase. Study used content analysis and how online news portal is disseminating information to the masses and prioritization given to the type of news. Systematic random sampling is employed, “Daily Express” and “Times of India” from United Kingdom and India were chosen based on their popular presence both in Print and Online. Sampling protocol encompasses searching and analysing coverage on Covid-19 of January, February, and March 2020, using a range of recall keywords and analysis in “six-point module” framework

Keywords: Pandemic, Covid-19, News Portals, News Pattern, Daily Express, Times of India

Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 had quivered human existence, millions of lives have been lost and change the way of life and creating a new normal. The risk associated with the spread of the disease also generates intense speculation among the media fraternity across the globe. In this critical situation, the government has taken initiatives to curb the spread of the virus using different media platforms in disseminating the information to the public for safety and precautionary measure to be taken and update the public about the current situation of the pandemic. This was most desirable at the time of lockdown when the movement of the people was not a feasible option. So, the only source of information accessible to the public was either radio, television, or the internet. The media in return disseminated useful information about the impact of the virus and induced fear among the public (Maji, 2021). This study selected two online news portals namely “Daily Express” and “Times of India” from the United Kingdom (UK) and India respectively. It evaluates on how the global pandemic have been communicated



using content analysis. Systematic random sampling was employed in the selection of news reports for the month of January, February, and March 2020. This study deliberated on the status and concerns of news reporting on covid-19 in India and the UK during the early phase of the global pandemic. The study analysed the pattern of news reporting and presentation in online news portals and the weightage of news content by identifying the frequency and measure the level of importance given to COVID related news between the two online news portals.

Managing the Risk

Covid-19 pandemics have been perceived as a serious threat to the humanity in recent memory. In 2000, under the guardianship of World Health Organization (WHO), Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) was formed for surveillance and collaboration mechanism. Reformed of the International Health Regulations (IHR) to tightened the global surveillance, formulated by 109 countries to respond to the pandemic (Scoons and Forster, 2010; WHO, 2005). In the post-war era, sense of imminence and menace linked with the pandemic risk is blatantly in divergence. A new era of anti-viral medication, vaccine, and antibiotic research promised against all known infectious diseases (Abraham, 2007; Dry and Leach, 2010). However, the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic shocked the global scientific community during the early 1980s. The novel lethal communicable diseases like Ebola and other fatal haemorrhagic fevers occurred since the mid-1970s in parts of Africa. During 2003–2004, the advent of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) had revolutionise the understanding of pandemic threat and demonstrated disease outbreak travel fast and infecting people in a matter of hours (Abraham, 2007).

In recent history, there were many infectious and contagious diseases that marked among the Deadliest Outbreaks and Pandemics. Few among them are the Spanish Influenza of 1918–19 caused acute illness in 25–30 percent of the world's population resulted in the death of estimated 40 million (Taubenberger and Morens, 2006), Ebola caused over 11,000 deaths by December 2015 (WHO, 2015) and H1N1 flu epidemic resulted in 60.8 million cases, and 12,469 deaths (CDC, 2019). By 2018, 74.9 million people have been infected with HIV, and 32 million died from AIDS (UNAIDS, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO), on 12th March 2020, declared 'Covid-19', formerly 2019 novel Coronavirus or 2019-nCoV as the Global Pandemic. The novel coronavirus first occurred in Wuhan, China towards the end of the year 2019. Till 2 February 2020, there were over 17000 confirmed cases with a casualty



rate of 2.1%, of which 3.1% in Hubei province above the rest of China (Leung, 2020). The Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDCP) in April 2020 issued a bulletin on the preventive measure. Till then the flu had spread to a wider area of Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, Canada, and other countries but the Chinese government detained and punished those who alarm about the disease (Greene et al., 2020). Dr. Li Wenliang, who suspected the first suspect of SARS-like illness spreading in Wuhan was later summoned by the authorities for spreading rumours (India Today, 2020). In its early stage of spread, in a country like the US, denials and misinformation have exacerbated its spread which slowed pandemic response and ultimately affected trust in public health experts (Motta et al., 2020). Globally, by March 2021, there have been 122,992,844 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,711,071 deaths, and a total of 397,950,709 vaccine doses have been administered (WHO, 2021). The situation is also not favourable in India as well. The first infection was found on 30th January 2020 in Kerala, and the first person who had died in India was on 12th March 2020 in the city of Kalburgi, Karnataka, and till 11th April 2020, 7447 total confirmed cases including foreigners, and 239 deaths (Indiastat, 2020). This was the time of lockdown when the movement and mobility of the people were in suspended animation. So, the only source of information accessible to the public was either radio, television, or the internet. The media in return disseminated useful information and the impact of the virus in mind of the public. In such a situation, the Government of India has taken various measures to combat the covid-19 through all the mediums such as Television, Radio, Online News, Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Instagram to disseminate correct information and provide a helpline to the public. The government uses these platforms to disseminate information to the public for safety and precautionary measure to be taken or to update the public about the current happening.

Media in time of Pandemic

In media landscape pandemics have been view through the militarisation by equating medics to an army, and drugs as weapons (Abraham, 2007; Scoons and Forster, 2010). Nevertheless, in this hour of utmost urgency, media plays the best channel to reach the masses via television, radio, and the internet. Even the public health agencies work in close contact with the media to pass the valuable information to the public which therefore helps in curbing the severity of the outbreak (Tchuenche and Bauch, 2012). While social media such as Twitter also found to be the detector of disease outbreaks in India (Jain and Kumar, 2015). It is asserted that media has the potential to reinforce or change attitudes and behaviours on a personal level through its



information distribution function (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Lin and Lagoe, 2013; Merskin, 1999). When the public started depending on the media, it becomes main source of information that they devour (Li, 2014). Nonetheless, the internet news became the primary source on which the public seeks updated information on the pandemic situation such as H1N1 and 2003 SARS (Lin and Lagoe, 2013).

Awareness through media has a remarkable role in limiting the spread of infectious diseases to the public (Tchuenche and Bauch, 2012). The television news and interpersonal communication discussion have more credibility in narrowing during the H1N1 pandemic knowledge gap between high and low socio-economic status individuals. Its content helps in effectively reducing the cognitive effect of storing and retrieving information by talking and discussing with friends, family, and colleagues providing an opportunity to broaden the knowledge about health issues and measures (Ho, 2012). News on the internet has a stronger predictor of H1N1 risk perception than the other medium due to the fast access and mobility of that traditional media (Lin and Lagoe, 2013).

As the cases increase manifold, news patterns of media-directed health communications divide the topics into different subjects such as prevention and control procedure, medical treatment and research, global and local socio-economic influences, material supplies and society support, etc (Liu et al., 2020). The effects of mass media report on pandemic outcomes elaborated on how the media report affects the opinion on important public health measurements. Further, the public gets motivated to acquire more information which has a direct impact on their day-to-day lives (Collinson et al., 2015). This has created an important outcome in minimising the severity of a pandemic, and the fear is directly correlated with the surge in social distancing behaviour and taking precaution (Maji, 2021). The news provided in the media holds a significant position in the dissemination of the correct information to the public pertaining to the support for public health measures (Jain and Kumar, 2015). Not to disregard the important media role, the coverage needs certain scrutiny and how the media identify and prioritize the best response during a crisis such as a pandemic emergency (Pieri, 2019). The growing number of fake news on Covid-19 creating distrust and confusion among the people (Jain and Kumar, 2015). It is found that misinformation circulated more in Twitter while news media stressed on the information regarding the preventive measures, misperceptions of the disease on the behaviours and attitudes of people could magnify the adverse effect of Covid-19 (Bridgman et al., 2020). Social media such as tweeters provide the platform to communicate directly to the public relating to health information. Thereby, a proper



surveillance system is required to monitor such information and address them appropriately. Nevertheless, media effects are gradual and increasing, as the message conjuring the idea of a stable stream of information, notions, and images that over a long period of time, and have influenced the public thought process (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

Methodology and data collection

The study takes a novel approach by accessing electronically to the News Portal coverage of Covid-19, an archive news portal, articles mentioning covid-19 were retrieved. The study used content analysis evaluating communication of the global pandemic in the early phase of Covid-19. It is undertaken to comprehend how the online news portal is disseminating the information to the masses and the prioritization given to the type of news. The news items are based on the textual mediated content published online excluding the audio-visual elements of the portals. During the early phase of Covid-19, amid the confusion and unclear notions about the virus which slowly spreading around the world, public became utmost concern about their health. The easy and fast source of information which they can rely on is the online news portals. For the sample selection, systematic random sampling was employed in the selection of news reports, whereas two online news portals namely "Daily Express" and "Times of India" from the United Kingdom (UK) and India were chosen based on their popular presence both in Print and online forms as well as free subscription for its readers. Sampling protocol encompasses searching and analysing the coverage on Covid-19 for the month of January, February, and March 2020, using a range of recall keywords (Covid-19, pandemic, virus).

The Daily Express is a tabloid newspaper known as Express. It is a London-based newspaper and was established in 1900. The newspaper covers foreign news and is known for reporting on World War I. The circulation of the newspaper reached one million by the end of the 20th century. Express is the first British newspaper to include a daily crossword. Ever since its foundation, the newspaper has maintained its position to be in the top 10 circulated newspapers in the UK and held the 6th position among the leading newspapers in the UK (Statista, 2020). Whereas, Times of India is one of the oldest newspapers in India started in the year 1838 and was known as "The Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce" under the editorship of JE Brennan as a bi-weekly newspaper (Parhi, 2018). The newspaper was founded to cater to the Europeans in India. During the period of India's Independence, Bennett, Coleman, and Co. Ltd who owned the company in 1892 sold to Ramkrishna Dalmia and subsequently by his son-in-law, Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain (Bhattacharjee, 2009). Today, the newspaper claims to have a readership of more than 7.6 million (ToI, 2013). It is reported that the "Times of India" is the



topmost read English daily and holds its ninth position among the largest newspapers in India (IRS, 2019).

News on these portals caters to the various segment of information from Covid-19 dead casualties, precautionary measures, environment, migration to lockdown. The study identified 18 different themes covering news reports related to Covid-19. Further, the paper employed Shih et al's (2008) epidemic framing typology on the news portal coverage of Covid-19 based on the six prominent frame the news reports found in the portals namely: Consequences, Uncertainty, Action, Reassurance, Conflict and New Evidence. Based on the epidemic framing typology, we further propose a six-point model (fig.1). We develop the present frames by adding the categories of 18 themes related to Covid-19 and selected and placed into different frames based on the valuation outlined in each frame.

Consequence: The diseases and virus cause dead and have an impact on the socio-economic life of the people. Development of the virus or the diseases tend to generate many of the other phenomena, issues, event, or discussion. Hence, under this frame we identified five categories of news i.e., safety measures/precautions, environment, features/special story, casualty/case, economy/commerce/share market. These are selected based on the causes of the virus that led to the development of varied situations.

Uncertainty: Similarly, news stories that focus on the uncertainty in any aspect including the possible causes, spreading and any medicine or treatment. Issues that may result in an unexpected or uncertainty about the future are included such as monitoring, testing & testing kits, and migrant labourers.

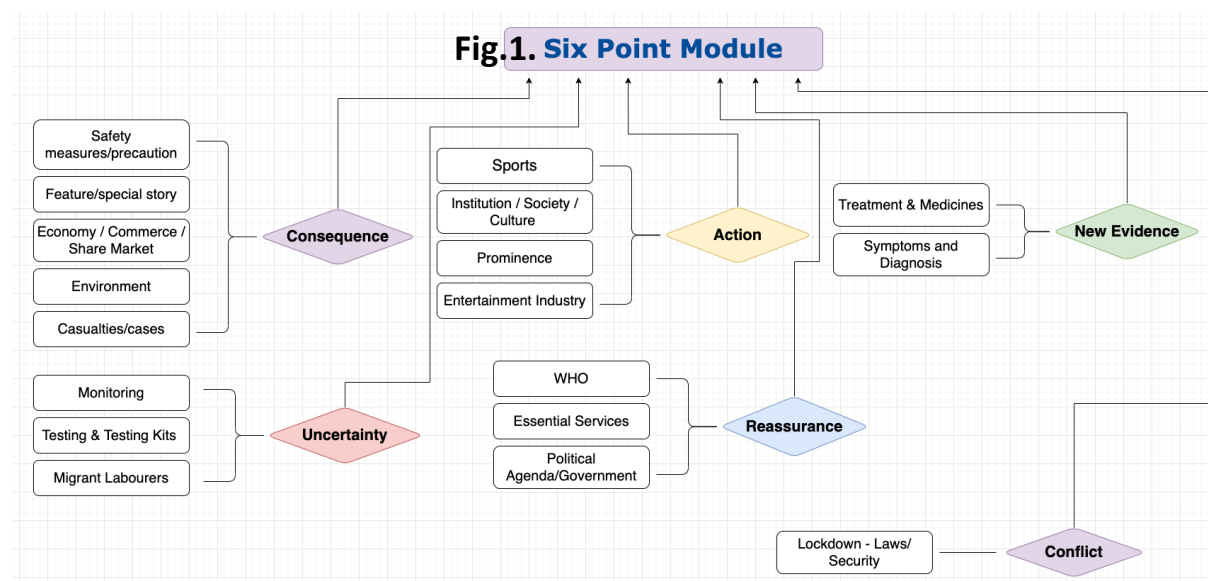
Action: In action frame, lockdown was one of the necessary steps and was the only way to control the spread of virus during the early phase of Covid-19. The decision made was out of deliberate discussion by the higher authority of the nation. The restriction was imposed on the organization and celebration of event in sports, institution/society/culture, entertainment industry and prominence.

Reassurance: In reassurance, the government and decision makers were very watchful about the complexity of the virus and how it could curb the further spread of the disease. At the same time, the frame also emphasised on the news relating the possible cure, precautionary measures and more importantly news reports giving assurance to public not to worry for the possible effect of the disease. This deliberation is mostly from the WHO, Political Agenda/Government and to avoid the panic among the people, special services provided due to shortage of goods during pandemic.



Conflict: News on the difference of opinion was also reported in the news portals. Conflict frames emerge in the form of violation of law in public places, not abide by the rules and security during the lockdown period etc. Stories on the different opinion on the evolution and the effect of the virus as no proper explanation was known at the time of early Covid-19. Therefore, lockdown, law & security is applied for the frame which focused on the difference in opinions as well as outright arguments/disagreements during the Covid-19.

New evidence: Lastly, new evidence in the form of discovery such as new strains of the disease, transmission of virus, progress towards the invention of medicine, treatment, safety measure that could curb the disease were referred to the frame of evidence which ultimately gives the overview on the understanding of the disease(Shih et al., 2008).



Framework has been constructed based on the news reports, govern in every category of news found in the analysis. The reports on environment, entertainment, or treatment the framing typologies can be relatable to all the discussion made. The dominant frames were recovered by qualitative textual analysis, and each qualitative dataset was read and annotated for frame analysis, through an inductive process of iterative identification, consolidation, and revision of emerging and recurrent themes and their grouping together to form larger frames(Halfpenny et al., 2009; Kitzinger, 2007; Mason, 2006).

Data Analysis

On average, news found in both the news portals is between 400-500 stories per day. Therefore, instead of evaluating each day's news item for three months, data is selected for every 5th day from 1st January to 31st March 2020 was chosen as a sample. This gives a better understanding of the news portal reporting for the accessibility to the larger part of the data collection in a



span of three months. As the data were collected from the news portal, it was easier to sort out the relevant news items from the websites. This is done by identifying the keywords such as 'Coronavirus', 'Covid-19', and 'Pandemic' from the list of news on the selected days which are searched in both the news portals of Daily Express and Times of India. Hence, news Reports/Stories of 19 Days each from the Daily Express and Times of India were shortlisted for collecting the sample for this study. Total number of 9279 News reports from "Times of India" and 8222 News Reports /Stories from "Daily Express" were scrutinized for Data Tabulation and Analysis. Then, news stories were categorised based on the thematic distribution of their content. Stories are identified and coded based on the 18 different themes and frequencies of Covid-19 related news items. Five graphs have been developed to explain the inclinations of news dissemination that were adopted by the news portal during the early phase of the pandemic.

Daily Express – Frequency of Covid-19 related News Stories

The frequency of news stories on the Daily Express has a total number of 8222 stories for three months. Out of which, 1783 were Covid-19 related news stories constituting 21.6% from the total news report. In the month of January, total number of news stories is 2892, of which 1.6% (48 news items) news stories is Covid-19 related news. The first news on Covid-19 was published on 6th January 2020.

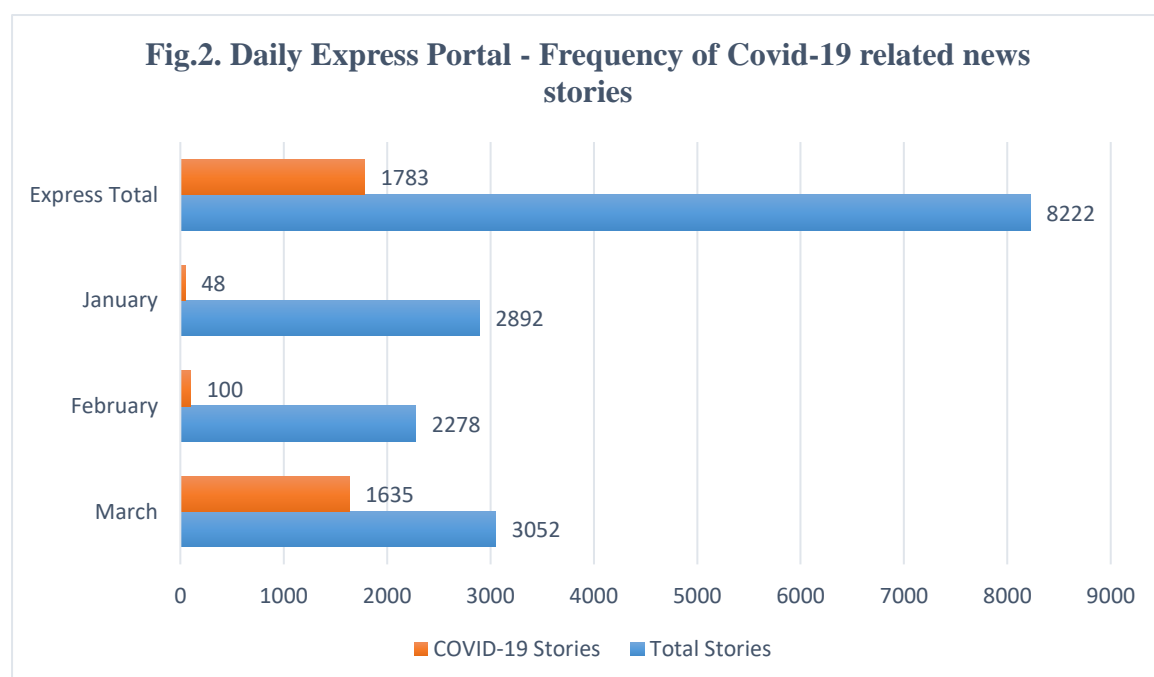
"A mystery lung disease which causes invasive lesions on the lungs has hit a heavily populated region of China, leaving 11 people seriously ill, and prompting baffled health officials to launch an urgent investigation. The illness, a pneumonia of unknown *etiology*...first reported on New Year's Eve in Wuhan City in Hubei Province. As of January 3...44 patients have been reported to the World Health Organization (WHO)...Media reports have said the Huanan Seafood market, where the disease was first identified...closed on January 1st for environmental sanitation and disinfection...WHO spokesperson said: "National authorities report that all patients are isolated and receiving treatment in Wuhan Medical Institutions...clinical signs and symptoms are mainly fever...difficulty in breathing, and chest radiographs showing invasive lesions of both lungs...some patients were operating dealers or vendors in the Huanan Seafood market." (Daily Express, 6 January 2020a)

This was the period when the outbreak of the virus emphasized on the alert and issue guidelines to the travellers as nothing asserting information regarding the virus was known. Gradually, the news relating to the symptoms of the virus and warnings was issued by the WHO became prominent.

In the month of February, a total number of news stories is recorded 2278, of which 100 news items constituting 4.3% of the news stories is Covid-19 news stories. This was the time the



news focused on the rapid spread of the virus in different nations and continents, ill effect of the deadly virus, quarantine, restrictions, and increased number of death due to the Covid-19. In comparison to the number of stories that has been reported in the month of January and February, the month of March has recorded the highest total number of stories with 3052. This month has the highest number of Covid-19 related stories of 1635 constituting 53.5% of the Covid-19 news. In the month of March, it is observed that the increased in the number of casualties, preventive measures, banned public gatherings, opinion on virus survival in warmer weather, shut down, shortage of food supply, loss in entertainment sectors, and affecting the sports personality due to the surge of Covid-19 reflected in the news stories.



Times of India– Frequency of Covid-19 related News Stories

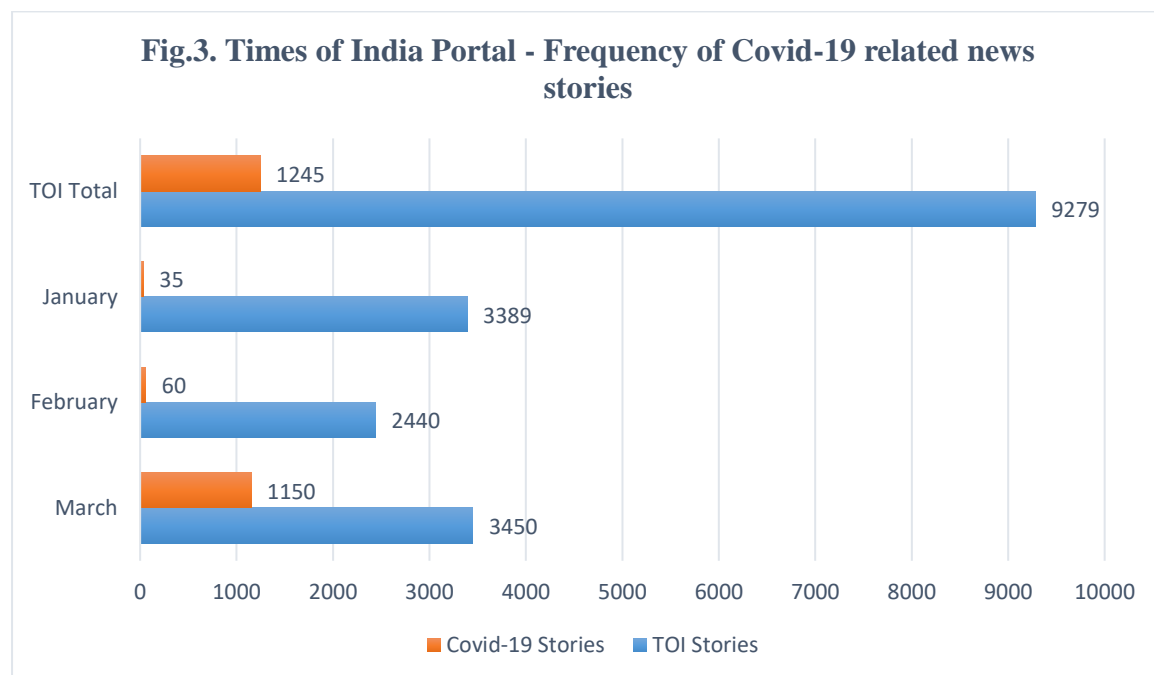
In the Times of India (ToI), the number of stories for the three months is 9279, out of which 1245 are covid-19 related news stories that constitute 13.4%. In the Times of India, news relating to Covid-19 first hit on 11th January with 1% (out of 3389). News regarding the first death due to the outbreak in China was reported first. One of the prime concerns during the early phase of the spreading of the virus was the evacuation of the Indians from China. Suspected cases of the virus, screening at the airports, awareness about the virus, monitoring, etc constituted a few of the news reports in ToI. The Times of India report its first case on 21st January:

“With the deadly novel coronavirus (nCoV) infection affecting more than 200 people and claiming three lives in China...authorities at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA)...sounded the first



alert as a precautionary step...based on the guidelines received from the Union ministry of Health and Family Welfare...set up a helpdesk at international arrivals. Thermal screening of passengers from Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur started...RGIHSs in Bengaluru and Wenlock Hospital in Mangaluru have been identified for treatment of any suspected case. "Till now, no suspected cases have been reported...if symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness are experienced during or after travel, passengers are encouraged to seek medical attention and share their travel history with healthcare providers," said Dr Prakash Kumar, Joint Director, CDHFWD. (*Times of India*, 21 January 2020)

Following the January month, February had 2.4% (60 news stories) of Covid-19 related news from 2440 stories. By the time, the presence of coronavirus was clearly established, increase in the number of cases in India, news relating to infodemic, monitoring, political agendas, revenue impact, increased number of casualties in China, and precautions were regular in the month of February. In comparison to the number of stories in January and February, the month of March has the highest number of total stories with 3250 news stories and this month also has the highest number of Covid-19 related stories with 33.3%. The news stories of March are important because discussion, pertinent to treatment of the disease, vaccination, misconception on the spreading of the virus, measures, restrictions on celebration of festivals, students stranded in Italy due to virus, shutting down of businesses etc. occupy a prominence space in the news portal.



While comparing the two-news portal, it is observed that the Daily Express (22%) is higher in Covid-19 related news stories than the ToI (14%). After scrutinizing the news stories in both the portals, this study has identified eighteenth different categories of news covered (discussed in the proceeding paragraphs).



Daily Express-Categories/Patterns of Covid-19 News Report

Of the total news coverage, casualties/cases, safety measures/precautions, and the political agenda/government constitute the top three categories and patterns of Covid-19 news reports. Of which, casualties/cases constitute 18.1% of the news covered. The rising number of infections and death concerns have been highlighted the most in the news portal. Since the study is based on the initial state of the pandemic, the reports on the first death in European countries and the regular updates from China that trigger restriction on traveling has been emphasised on the portal. Few deliberations on the health-related risk factors that lead to positive cases were published. Expert's opinion on the prediction of death in coming future and assertion made on the higher number of death toll than the official records.

“...Britain's coronavirus crisis will continue until spring 2021, a secret document from Public Health England (PHE) reveals, as nearly eight million Britons are expected to need hospital treatment...so far seen 1,372 people infected with the viral disease ...35 have died...PHE is preparing for the possibility of 80 percent of Britain's 66.4 million inhabitants being infected...” (Daily Express, 2020c)

The next category is the safety measures/precautions with 16.1%. The fear and worry created circumstances that made the higher authority and the government to take strict restrictions on the public movement leading to lockdown, quarantine, and shutting down of the educational institutions and offices. Even if WHO were apprehended, if lockdown were lifted then the possibilities of a re-surge of the infection number. This way portal has, of course, used the platform to reach the public to take all precautionary measures to keep safe from the virus along with reporting the news to the public. Media seem to induce fear among the public and having great impact during the early stage of emerging infectious diseases(Maji, 2021; Yang et al., 2009).

“...Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jenny Harries told the daily coronavirus briefing at Downing Street... socially distance and self-isolate had brought some "helpful movement" to the slope of the epidemic curve. The expert had been confronted about a precise time for when the country would hit the peak of the outbreak.” (Daily Express 26 March 2020)

The political agenda and government are the third highest constituting 11.1%. The Government has an active role in imposing restrictions to keep the virus in control. Aid was provided to the self-employed who have been adversely affected due to the lockdown. The government meeting begins online in the UK during the increased number of cases and after some of the members of the House of Commons found Covid-19 positive.

“Members of a Social Democrat Party (SPD) working group have been told to work from home after it emerged a guest who attended a session on March 2 had tested positive... SPD MP Karl Lauterbach said: Yes, there is the suspicion that there is a case in the Bundestag. All SPD



deputies who attended the meeting had left the parliament. I don't think I have infected myself, but I still go into quarantine until Sunday..." (*Daily Express*, 11 March 2020)

While, 5% to 9% of the news coverage covered the news related to economy/commerce/share (6%), feature/special news (6%), symptoms/diagnosis (6%), WHO (6%), and lockdown, law, and security (9%).

Economy/Commerce/Share (6%)

"...It comes as countries around the world have been put on lockdown in a bid to stop the spread of the virus...if the crisis continues, unemployment could reach up to 30 percent and economies could contract by 30 percent. There will be no recovery. There will be social unrest. There will be violence." (*Daily Express*, 26 March 2020)

WHO (6%)

"Yesterday, China's National Health Commission called for the "reasonable use" of protective suits in a statement that echoed advice from the World Health Organisation (WHO) last week. WHO Director General Dr Tedros warned against the "widespread inappropriate use" of equipment such as face masks on Friday, which have been largely sold out across the globe as coronavirus fears spike...first priority is health workers; the second priority is those who are sick or caring for someone who is sick. It comes as the death toll is reported to be at least 910. This number has now exceeded the 774 fatalities reported during the SARs outbreak in 2002-2003." (*Daily Express*, 2020a)

Symptoms/Diagnosis (6%)

"Coronavirus symptoms include dry cough and fever...researchers have now called for quicker and more aggressive treatment to eradicate the pandemic...scientists from the US, France, China and Hong Kong have warned the virus takes about four days to jump from person to the next. The scientists measured the time it took for symptoms to manifest in two people with the virus, where one person infected the other. On average, the study found the so-called interval for coronavirus in China is only four days." (*Daily Express*, 16 March 2020)

Security (9%)

"A lockdown in the UK has meant people have been told to remain at home as much as possible to stop the spread of coronavirus. The Government have vowed to issue on the spot fines of £30 to those found breaking the rules. But is this enough to encourage people to follow the guidelines? This poll is now closed. Under new laws announced by Prime Minister Boris Johnson in his address to the nation, Britons should only leave the house if it is an absolute necessity. This includes for food shopping, for essential travel, or for one method of exercise per day. It has also been forbidden to congregate in groups larger than two people in public. Anyone who is found breaking these rules could face an on the spot fine of £30." (*Daily Express*, 26 March 2020)

While below 5% were a news related to monitoring (1%), testing and testing kits (2%), treatment and medicine (2%), prominence (2%), entertainment industry (3%), institution/society/culture (3%), essential services (3%), and sports (4%).

Monitoring (1%)

"Millions of people use crowded public transport every day despite the ongoing threat of coronavirus...transport operators have come to be at the frontline of an international public health crisis. Efforts to combat the spread are ongoing and the UK is still in the containment phase despite confirmed cases growing by roughly 50 per day...When an infected person coughs or sneezes...expel tiny droplets containing the virus into the air, ranging to approximately 6ft...naturally fall to the floor or on surfaces...live for up to 12 hours - so if you touch a hand rail or press the button infected with the bacteria and then touch your face, you



could be at risk. This risk is exacerbated on tightly packed commuter lines.” (*Daily Express*, 11 March 2020).

Testing and Testing Kits (2%)

“Coronavirus has infected 87,490 Britons...New self-testing kits are on their way...UK government has bought 3.5million coronavirus home-testing kits...finger-prick antibody test – draws a drop of blood – detects if a person has had coronavirus and has since recovered. This will reveal if the person has gained an immunity against SARS-CoV-2.” (*Daily Express*, 26 March 2020)

Treatment and Medicine (2%)

“...There is no scientific evidence that Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), western herbal medicine, homeopathic medicine, Vitamin C, or other proposed remedies are effective against the Wuhan coronavirus (now named 2019-nCoV). This is despite the Chinese National Health Commission suggesting TCM as a treatment approach, listing Chinese herbal prescriptions for use on patients depending on which of the four Chinese medicine categories their conditions fell into – ‘damp, hot, toxic, bruised...anything people might do for the flu would be good...having lots of fluids, getting plenty of rest and taking aspirin.” (*Daily Express*, 5 March 2020)

Prominence (2%)

“Martin Lewis...fronted a special episode of The Martin Lewis Money Show to discuss the financial impact of coronavirus...revealed banks including Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, Halifax and Nationwide have introduced new rules regarding overdraft payments...said: "Most overdrafts from the 6 April were set to be 40 percent. "They've got up hugely, nearly double the high street credit card overdraft. "Thankfully, some of the banks are starting to see that the timing is bad on that. "Here's what has been announced, most of them in the last few hours." Banks including Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds, Halifax and Bank of Scotland have changed their policies, as a temporary measure.” (*Daily Express* 26 March 2020)

Entertainment Industry (3%),

“...No Time to Die, the 25th James Bond movie was moved to November...Johnny Depp spent thousands to keep Pirates of the Caribbean crew warm...John Wayne wore wet suit under his tuxedo at last public appearance weeks before death...Many movies have been forced to be delayed, but some of those are particularly difficult for fans to get their heads around...Marvel/Sony venture, which is currently being kept tightly under wraps, is also delayed to 2021, being pushed back only three months. But sci-fi comedy fans will be dismayed to learn the new Ghostbusters movie, which sees many of the original cast return, has also been put on hold for eight months, meaning it will no longer have its summer release.” (*Daily Express*, 31 March 2020)

Institution/Society/Culture (3%)

“Cheltenham festival is set to take place from Tuesday to Friday...despite the coronavirus crisis across the UK, Europe and the world...Cheltenham will put several procedures in place amid the threat of coronavirus...additional toilets and handwashing facilities and additional staff will operate in all toilet areas to ensure that soap and drying facilities are constantly available.” (*Daily Express* 11 March 2020)

Essential Services (3%)

“...Environment Secretary George Eustice has urged shoppers to respect supermarkets plans to limit the purchase of certain items during the coronavirus pandemic. Shelves have been stripped of essential items, such as toilet rolls, hand sanitiser, paracetamol, meat, fruit and vegetables as shoppers ignore pleas not to stockpile. It has led to supermarkets having to bring in limits on the amount of some items sold, with golden shopping hours introduced to help the elderly and NHS and care workers.” (*Daily Express*, 21 March 2020)

Sports (4%)

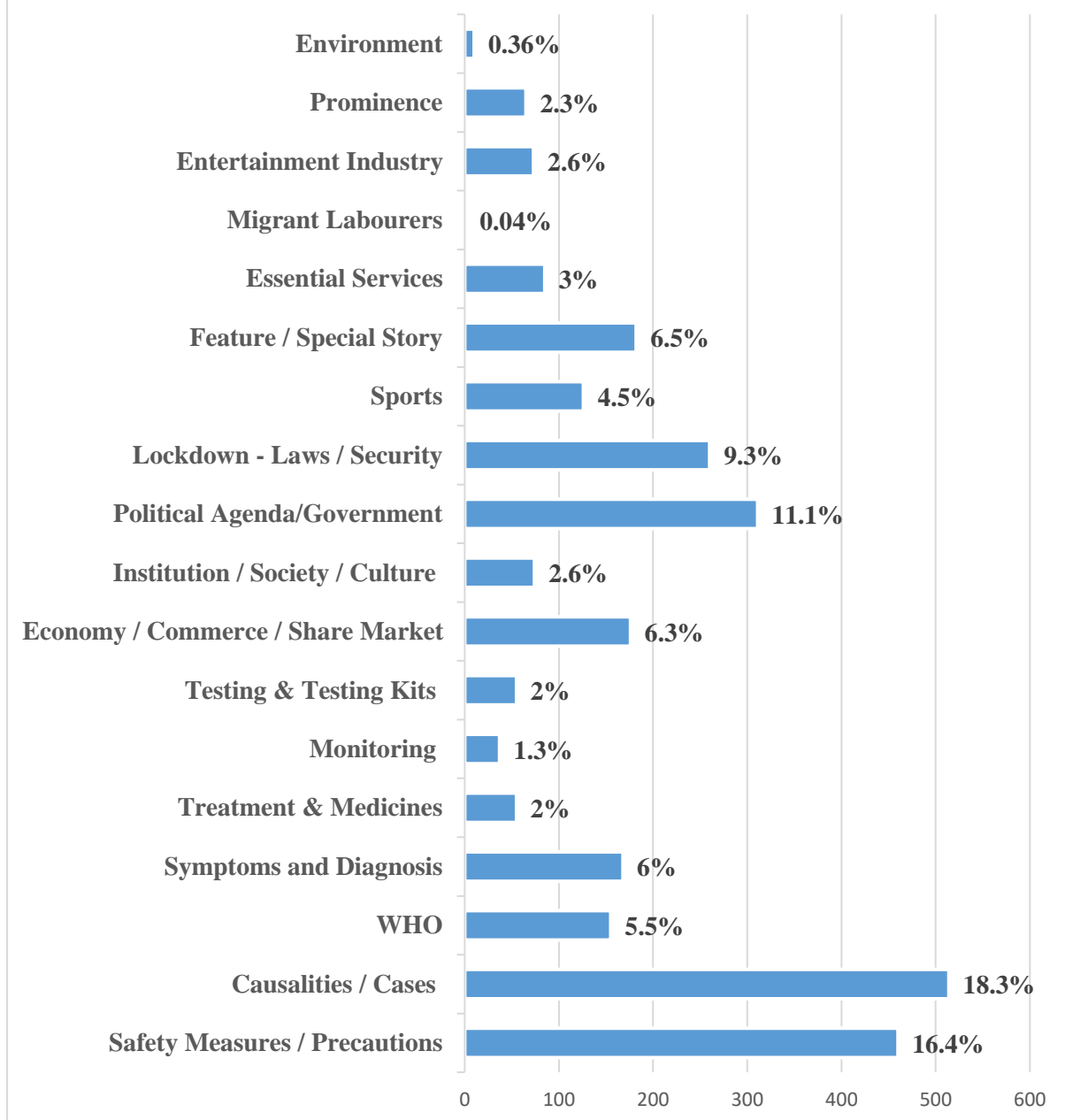
“...Manchester United have taken serious steps to protect their players from coronavirus as they banned all non-essential visitors from attending their Carrington training ground. Austria's



Health Minister, Rudolf Anschober, said: "All outdoor events with over 500 people, 100 indoor, will be cancelled until mid-April." But United forward Marcus Rashford tweeted: "Football is the fans... period. But the safety and well-being of our fans has to come first. Without you, we're nothing. If you're not feeling well, call 111 for advice." Meanwhile, Arsenal's showdown with City has been cancelled because the Gunners squad came into contact with Olympiakos owner Evangelos Marinakis during their Europa League tie." (*Daily Express*, 11 March 2020)

Environment

"NASA has released two stunning satellite images which reveal the dramatic drop in air pollution across China as the coronavirus continues to keep large parts of the country on lockdown...US space agency maps show how levels of nitrogen dioxide has fallen over the past two months as millions of people stay indoors and the manufacturing industry continues to slow down. The first image was shot to the north of the city of Wuhan which was where the outbreak of the coronavirus began. The graphic was taken between January 1 to January 20 before the mass quarantine period began and reveals a dense concentrate of the harmful gas." (*Daily Express*, 1 March 2020)

**Fig.4. Express- Categories/Patterns of Covid-19 News Report**

Times of India-Categories/Patterns of Covid-19 News Stories

Safety measures and precautions, and lockdown, laws and security covered 17% each in Times of India (ToI). The precautionary measure such as the installation of Thermal scanners in the airports, public and religious places, and even the entertainment industry took safety measures not to spread the virus. Therefore, one of the precautionary measures to stop the virus is to maintain social distance and the best possible way to maintain was lockdown. The Government had announced complete lockdown in some parts of the country while in others followed suit after the number of positive cases increased. Nevertheless, this initiative had unfolded different



problems such as stranded students and foreigners, violations, price rises in commodities, and others.

“Major public and private transport bodies in the state have directed their employees to keep a tab on passengers and ensure cleanliness in vehicles after a Dubai-returned techie from Bengaluru, who travelled to Hyderabad in a bus, tested positive for the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) infection recently...Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) has told all its officials to ensure the strictest level of cleanliness in vehicles amid the Covid-19 scare. “Instructions regarding hygiene have been issued,” state transport commissioner Shekhar Channe said.” (*Times of India*, 6 March 2020b)

While political agenda/government with 13%. Some of the stories covered under this category were taking an active role during the pandemic, quarantine for suspected cases, relief funds for the needy, levy tax, and counselling the public against misinformation and news not without the blame game of different political interest.

“Madras high court has directed the central and state governments to file a counter on a plea which sought to facilitate the safe return of Tamil people who are stranded in China following the coronavirus outbreak. M Samayaselvam, a resident of Madurai and state secretary of the youth wing of Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Union in his petition stated that the association works on assisting Tamils working abroad for their safe return to India in case of any mishap or any untoward incidents” (ToI, 2020a)

“Chief Minister KCR on Friday appealed to PM Narendra Modi to utilise laboratory facilities at Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) to conduct Covid-19 tests...KCR said CCMB has the facilities to conduct tests for about 1,000 samples at a time, which could be used by other states...” (*Times of India* 21 March 2020)

Rest of the news stories occupy 6% to 11 % related to the feature/special story (6%), economy/commerce/share (6%), essential services (8%), casualties/cases (8%), and institution/society/culture (11%).

Economy (6%)

“After a brief pause last week, the intensity of selling on Dalal Street that had resumed on Friday continued on Monday with the Sensex closing the session 1,375 points, or 4.6%, down at 28,440. Market players said that fears about a sharp decline in economic growth due to issues relating to Covid-19, including a humanitarian crisis because of the reverse migration of labour force, weighed on investor sentiment. This led to the sharp spike in selling in the new week.” (*Times of India* 31 March 2020)

Casualty (8%)

“After a scrap dealer from a Gomtipur Chawl died on Sunday because of Covid-19, a major challenge stares at health authorities in Ahmedabad now managing the disease in the crowded slums and shawls of the city.” (*Times of India* 31 March 2020)

Essential Services (8%)

“With supermarkets and malls shut as a precautionary measure in the wake of Covid-19 threat, small-time grocery outlets have come to the rescue of residents who were running pillar-to-post to buying essential commodities.” (*Essential Services-Times of India*, 21 March 2020)

Institutions/Culture/Society (11%)

“On Wednesday, the Prime Minister’s official handle tweeted that “experts across the world have advised to reduce mass gatherings to avoid the spread of COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus...decided not to participate in any Holi Milan programme” ...President Ram Nath Kovind’s office informed



that the Rashtrapati Bhavan will not hold the traditional Holi gatherings as a precautionary measure...Dilli Haat calls off Holi event, Holi Moo to refund tickets." (*Times of India* 6 March 2020)

Whereas the least coverage news stories were symptoms/diagnosis (4%), monitoring (3%), treatment and medicine (2%), migrant labour (2%), WHO (2%), testing kits and entertainment industry (1%) with below 5%.

Monitoring (3%)

"Not just China, those with a recent travel history to Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong will be subjected to screening at airports across Madhya Pradesh. So far, MP has not reported any positive case of Novel corona virus infection." (*Times of India*, 11 February 2020)

Treatment (2%)

"Doctors of Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Hospital are receiving phone calls from other states and countries including the US after it cured three coronavirus patients using combination drugs." (*Times of India* 16 March 2020)

Migrant (2%)

"Determined migrant workers fear for their jobs more than the coronavirus outbreak, lockdown or the sealing of inter-state borders even as they make the backbreaking trek of over 1,000 kilometres, traversing three to four states, with their family and children..." (*Times of India* 31 March 2020)

WHO (2%)

"The global death toll from the new coronavirus has passed 4,000 and the outbreak has spread to over 100 countries. Meanwhile, India's count of coronavirus cases rose to 60 with two fresh positive cases - one each from Delhi and Rajasthan.... Expressing increasing alarm about mounting infections, the World Health Organization declared Wednesday that the global coronavirus crisis is now a pandemic." (*Times of India*, 11 March 2020)

Testing Kits (1%)

"Private doctors have asked the district administration to make personal protection equipment (PPE) available at the earliest as it is not available in the market." (*Times of India* 21 March 2020)

Entertainment (1%)

"...Majority of the cinema halls have witnessed dip in their daily collections...many cinema producers...have postponed their schedule..." "Since Monday when an Italian tourist was tested positive of corona virus, there has been dip in the collections of the film Thappad. The film was doing well till Sunday. Many people are opting for cancelations too. With the apprehensions and scare I think upcoming releases would also be affected," said Raj Bansal..." (*Times of India*, 6 March 2020)

Environment (1%)

"With vehicular traffic almost coming to a standstill, the pollution levels in the city, especially nitrogen oxide levels, recorded a drastic fall on Wednesday..." "We have noticed a drastic fall in the vehicular pollution levels and reparable suspended particulate matter (RSPM) in all our stations, mainly at Vytila and MG Road which often record the highest levels because of the huge traffic movement," said KSPCB chief environmental engineer MA Baiju...the pollution levels crossed 100 microns for nitrogen oxide (NOX) — a parameter that indicates high emissions from vehicles — in the first couple of weeks in March. The dust pollution levels indicated by PM 10 (particulate matter) were also very high in this region. The standard for NOX is 80 microns in 24 hours while it is 100 microns for PM 10 in 24 hours." (*Times of India* 26 March 2020)

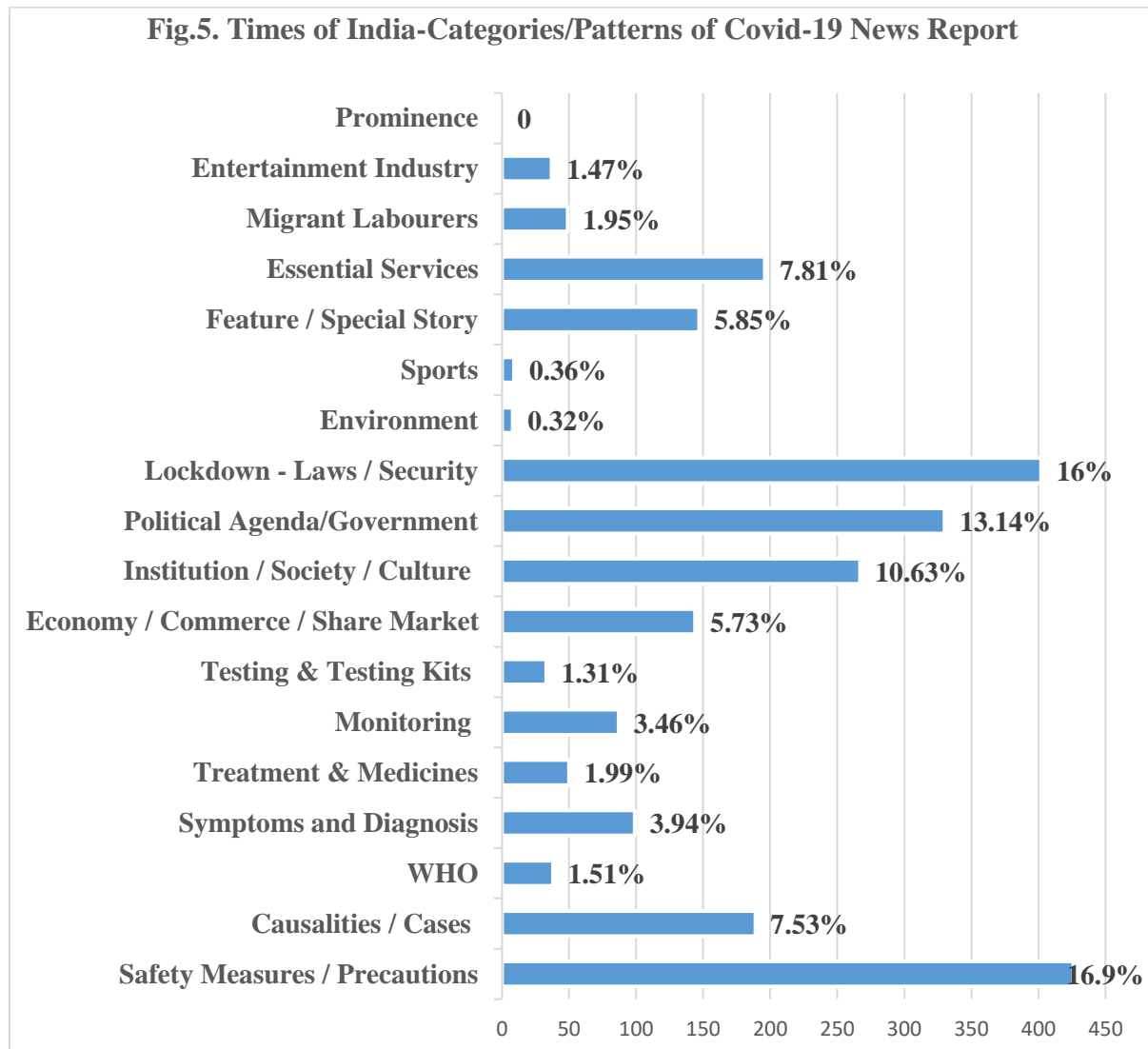
Sports

"Abhinav Bindra's visit to Gurgaon was all about business. He was here to launch a branch of his wellness and fitness centre. He says, "We were looking at two populations – the athletes and the non-athletes. Of course, there are athletes in the region but also, there are lots of corporates, and



what we do here is well suited for them. I have always wanted to be here, and I finally got a chance now.” (*Times of India*, 16 March 2020)

Fig.5. Times of India-Categories/Patterns of Covid-19 News Report



Discussion

The study investigates the news coverage of early phase of Covid-19 in India and UK by undertaking the content analysis of three months. Through the analyses of the number of daily news reports, it is found that the news coverage in both the portal is between 400-500 stories per day. Having said, the ‘Daily Express’ has 12% Covid-19 related news report from the total numbers of news and ‘Times of India’ with 13%. Frequency of the Covid-19 news increased since its inception which is common for both Times of India and Daily Express. The top three categories of news stories reported in ‘Daily Express’ are Casualties and Cases (18%), Security Measures and Precautions (17%), and Political Agenda/Government (11%). While the top three categories of news stories reported in ‘Times of India’ are Security Measures and Precautions (17%), Lockdown-Laws and Security (17%), and Political Agenda/Government (13%). In



comparison, between the two-news portal, on average, 42% of news stories of Covid-19 per day appeared in 'Daily Express' and 90% in 'Times of India'. However, less news stories were reported on Monitoring, Symptoms and Diagnosis, Testing and Treatments in both the news portals despite health-related news and information needs wider dissemination. Of the two, Daily Express contributes 18% while 'Times of India' 12% of news stories related to Covid-19.

As the study constitute 18 different themes covered in the news reports of Covid-19, commonly identified topic of the news are coded under the themes. The main highlight in the study is the 'safety measure and precautions' which includes not only about how the higher authority and management are taking every step to handle during the situation but on how society is taking their own initiative to keep themselves safe. The news related to the World Health Organisation are considered for the sample under the theme WHO. Essential services constituted the special aid for food and other commodities provided by the government and the organisations during the pandemic lockdown. This was the time of trial-and-error period for the medical practitioners to identify which medicines and treatment could work best. News related to the different procedures undertaken for the treatment of the Covid patients, alternative medicine or home-made measures were included in treatment and medicine. Likewise, news relating to sports such as cancellation of events, sportsperson health check-up, announcement of post-pond of leagues etc are codified. Under the economy/commerce/share market, the lockdown had impacted and declined of economic and market values around the world. India also witnesses the drastic drop in the economy, many businesses have shut down, and an increased in number of cut-down of services which cause unemployment.

Our next sets of evaluation of the news items are based on the six-point module. We have categorised the news themes into the different frames. The value assigned in all the themes are calculated under each frame. The average number of the themes is reflecting the frames that mostly followed in the early phase of Covid-19.

Consequences measured 48% which is the highest amongst the other frames in the present study. Hence, stories include are the casualties, safety measures, feature stories related to Covid-19, news that directly impact the economic growth and on the amiable of the environment due to the outcome of lockdown. The second topmost frame that got highlighted are on the Reassurance with 20%. This frame focus on the news from WHO, Political Agenda/Government and the special services during the Covid-19. Whereas, Action



constituted 12%, Conflict 9%, New Evidence 8% and the least is the Uncertainty with only 3%.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemics pose difficult challenges to contemporary society as well as generate intense media coverage. Media have both the accountability and the competency role to disseminate news related to the spread of diseases. Henceforth, it is also necessary to understand what news was disseminated, what information was given more prominence and what should have been reported more for the public to take necessary action in due course of time. Conceivably, media has the utility of, and is the best know-how in gratifying the public in terms of material that is needed and wanted by the people because it offers reliable and structured information. During the pandemic, amidst the confusion public mostly depend on online news portals for the information as they believe it to be more reliable. Though, media play a vital role in dissemination of the awareness, framing the risk of contagion is key to the way a crisis is perceived and remains central to the public discourses. Pandemics, in media's framework, have been view through the war framing of the crisis or militarisation, equating medics and drugs to army, weapons, and making roadmap to the media to construct a panic narrative (Abraham, 2007; Elbe, 2010; Scoons & Forster, 2010). Nevertheless, the media coverage continues to matter, given that the rise and replication of the information is likely to have an impact on the understanding of the risk. The gathered information of media is paramount to, in identifying the best responses in locating the priorities to the pandemic emergency, and likely to have an impact on the future's pandemic response. The study does not comprehend the critical analysis, rather emphasises on the headlines of all Covid-19 related news stories from the selected days in both the Times of India and Daily Express. The visual and audio elements are also not considered to include in the present study. Hence, this provides a scope for future study, news analysis using images, video and audio could be developed into a different perspective to the research study. Based on the data collected and on the epidemic framing typology, we derived to a six-point model. This model enables to identified a number of areas for future research. We recommend that future research examine the critical analysis of each of the news frames during the early phase of Covid-19. We further recommend to include the audio-video contents into a new frame and its comparison with that of the textual analysis of news. Since, the current study is on the online platforms which consequently has



the provision for the citizens to react on the various news stories. Therefore, a research study on feedback or comments on each of the frames can be undertaken for further development on the news related to early phase of Covid-19. This study will assist to understand the reader's frame of mind and also will provide ample opportunity to comprehend the impact of different frames on the mind of the people.

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