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Natural Calamities and Sensation in Media; A Study of Corona Virus Coverage in Electronic Media of Pakistan

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History <i>Revised format: February 2021</i> <i>Available Online: March 2021</i>	<p>The present paper critically examines the covid-19 reporting in the electronic media of Pakistan that how the electronic media is helping to fight or sensationalize the reports and updates of Coronavirus. In particular, it pays attention to the concepts of sensationalism related to natural calamities in electronic media. It also considers the impact of Covid-19 reporting how the electronic media is helping viewers through awareness campaigns whether it is creating motivation or stress among viewers. The data is collected by employing the survey method. Based on the data insights, the paper concludes by arguing that Pakistan's electronic media is creating stress, fear, and negative reporting and have low awareness campaigns related to Covid-19. The chapter suggests the implementation of guidelines by PEMRA. Moreover, more campaigns should be executed to create awareness and reducing fear among people.</p>
Keywords <i>sensationalism, PEMRA, campaigns</i>	
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1. Introduction

Natural Calamities comes mysteriously and suddenly. The world faced many natural disasters and had lost so many important lives. Calamities destroy the routine of life and cause economic and functional losses of societies. (IFRC, 2015) A disaster is not a single event; it may have various causes and consequences, and so each disaster is unique. (IFRC). In Pakistan, we have faced different natural issues related to diseases and disasters i.e. Fluid, Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, Dengue, Earthquakes, etc. In 2020, the world is under an apocalypse, Corona apocalypse. It is currently engrossed with the corona virus (Covid-19) which attacks people exclusive of any discrimination of rich and poor, black or white, fat or thin,

Muslims or non-Muslims spreading viciously around the whole world (Kiani, 2020). At this moment the world is going through a crisis in every phase, it is either country's economic power or social power. The media is raged over this pandemic, everyone wants to live and no one wants to die. Over the past couple of months, this virus has spread over the whole world starting from Wuhan in China. A tiny virus has taken over the whole world economy. Pakistan already being a developing country is undergoing a major crisis in every industry. The lockdowns are over the whole country causing chaos in the economy. While in all these calamities, the media has played an important role by reporting all of the calamities that Pakistan has gone through. The electronic media of Pakistan is free and independent assisted by PEMRA, 2002 (PEMRA Ordinance 2002, Amended 2007) Many channels got the license and the race of rating and reporting the news first started. This race gave birth to sensationalism, Bias, false reporting, and exaggerating the news to get more attention and ratings for the channel. People are interested to know facts and figures of mishap and know the truth but the media is more upon showing a negative image of everything. There are several reports on electronic media that were reported and then reporters/channels or journalists get to know that the report was fake and is old or demographics are not the same, as we already have reported. In an age driven by ratings, likes, and clicks, neither journalists nor the masses are interested in carrying out proper research into a matter before commenting upon it. (Zafar Imad, 2020, Tribune). Media is showing Covid-19 cases that got positive, Death rates of almost every country, pictures of patients died by Coronavirus and there is very little reporting which is related to recovery. Media is more up to spreading fear, anxiety, uncertainty, thrill, and sensation through news bulletins and current affairs programs by which viewers get mental stress, panic, demotivated, lose hope and it is damaging their mental health. People are not getting it seriously due to lack of proper awareness. Instead of going for tests, they are running from it as if they will die because they are in a panic. Sensationalism in media is getting worst with respect to time and many new channels are following it too as they see other big channels criteria of reporting. The hype and sensation of calamity remain until electronic is not getting any new topic to talk on. As time passes, they change their way to other topics. When the previous calamity like Covid-19 again shows some more positive cases, Pakistan electronic media starts reporting negativity because they see cases are increasing. They didn't report anything positive in the time of lower cases and when the graphs of cases reported were showing positive outcomes and people were recovering.

2. Literature Review

In the research of "Role of electronic media in mitigating the psychological impacts of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)" (Bilala, Faiza Latif, Muhammad Farhan Bashir, Bushra Komald, Duoqiao Tana, 2020) concluded that media plays a big role in every aspect of life. Pakistani electronic media enjoys the freedom of speech and they feel free for reporting every sort of news. In this pandemic situation of the corona virus. Media is more upon spreading fear and panic among the users and is less to show positive sides. Electronic media has direct contact with the public as they can motivate people and can spread positive messages easily just as they do in Ramzan transmission, Eid transmissions, 14 August, 23 March, and through other programs. In this pandemic situation, people need motivation, awareness, and make people believe that Covid-19 exists and they can get through it by arranging some awareness programs. Media can manage programs for children, students, as this is the time of need to get aware and get relive from fear, stress, anxiety, and thoughts of death.

In this time of Covid-19, children are not different as they also are getting mental health problems. Media is so accessible to everyone and everywhere and it is too difficult for a person to stop their child from seeing news programs fearful, stressful, and the news that is spreading more panic instead of awareness. Many families who are in isolation spend more time in front of electronic media watching news and programs related to Covid-19. The patients, children, and relatives need to be hopeful and out of stress. Stress is not good for corona patients as it reduces the immune system of those patients. (Mental health considerations for children & adolescents in COVID-19 Pandemic by Nazish Imran, Muhammad Zeshan, Zainab Pervaiz, 2020).

The mental stress of students is also damaging due to continuous reporting about Covid-19 by which students are facing difficulties to focus on their studies. Students are getting frustrated and depressed related to their studies due to the corona virus, social lockdowns, and financial losses due to lockdown resulting in mental health problems. (“Psychological Impact of COVID-19 on Pakistani University Students and How They Are Coping” Muhammad Salman, June 2020).

In the study of “Natural Catastrophes and Role of Pakistani Mass Media” (Lubna Zaheer, 2016) the role of media is based on happenings. They do not follow-up the news of disasters as it is overlooked. The predictable disasters like flood, rain, etc. They all are not reported before its happening. The media reports the news on the time of happening and is not reporting positive aspects that how things are recovering. The rehabilitation period is totally ignored. The study suggests that media should follow up on the post period of disasters and should spread awareness that how things can get better and try to reduce the stress of people by awareness and positivity, showing better side, recovery period, and awareness.

In the area of influenza A (H1N1, 2009) the electronic media of Pakistan was exaggerating the pandemic and their attitude towards the situation was not as serious as to control the situation of influenza. The outcome of “A Study on Perception evaluation of Pakistani population against Influenza A (H1N1)” (INT. J. BIOL. BIOTECH., 8 (3): 427-432, 2011) is that the need of clear, visible and accurate and authentic information is required to get better awareness to deal with the pandemic outbreak of disease. Sensationalist media coverage of the outbreak works to further make worse existing fears, including some intentionally pandering to intolerant stereotypes or peddling widely held rumors. (Zeng J. 2020, The Guardian). People get trauma after watching content related to trauma in media on an hourly or daily bases resulting in stress and anxiety also in previous diseases i.e H5N1, influenza more media revelation was found to be related to increased fear as such, we anticipated that for the coronavirus epidemic, more coverage to threat information e.g. reading news bulletins about new deaths, media posts would increase fear of the Covid-19 ([G Mertens](#), [L Gerritsen](#), S Duijndam, [E Salemink](#)... - Journal of Anxiety, 2020 – Elsevier). Media played an abnormal role which increased distress and anxiety because as cases of corona virus began to occur, media houses took the virus as a killer virus and a deadly disease which considering the mortality rate is sensationalist. Media has faced the epidemic with untrustworthy material, an inherent lack of trust from viewers, and rigorously understaffed workforces in many cases. (M Loxton, R Truskett, B Scarf, L Sindone... - Journal of Risk and Financial Management, 2020 - mdpi.com) Media is showing inclines very much in the area of negative reporting and on negative aspects of Covid-19 i.e increase in death rates, increased cases, panic among investor resulting in no investment as they start thinking that they will face losses if they invested anything in the time of Corona outbreak. ([PC Tetlock](#) - The Journal of finance, 2007 - Wiley Online Library) ([O Haroon](#), [SAR Rizvi](#) - Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Finance, 2020 – Elsevier).

Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To know if there is any impact of TV news reporting and Talks shows on the viewers' minds.
2. To investigate if there is any impact of awareness campaigns of electronic media among viewers.
3. To find out if electronic media broadcasting related to Covid-19 is creating stress or motivation among viewers.
4. Do people believe information coming from news about Covid-19 or not? If not then why?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The quantitative research design is used to find the impact of electronic media regarding news reporting and awareness campaigns of electronic media of Pakistan related to Covid-19.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Strategy

The sample size was compromised of 150-200 participants who spend time watching the news. An

online questionnaire created in Google Forms was given to random participants for data collection. There was no age, qualification, or any other restrictions to fill the form for data collection. A convenient sampling strategy was used to recruit participants.

3.3 Proposed Analysis

Data analysis will be done in %ages and averages and analyzed data will be presented in the form of tables and graphs.

3.4 Demographic Information

The sample comprised 52.5% female and 47.5% are male, where 11.2% were tested corona positive.

Figure 1: Count of Time spend on watching news channels daily (In hours)

There are 64.4% of people who watch television for less than 1 hour and 24.4% 1 to 5 hours and more as shown in figure 1. The average age of respondents is approximately 28 where the lowest age of the participant was 18 and the highest age of the participant was 56.

4. Results

It is been analyzed some points through the data collection that people are having some issues regarding electronic media coverage of Covid-19. To find the issues, some close-ended questions were used in an online questionnaire where 150 to 200 respondents constituted.

Figure 2: Count of Pakistani Electronic Media is fair regarding Covid-19 News reporting

The result showed that viewers of electronic media think that it is not fair regarding Covid-19 news reporting. Almost 50% of viewers have disagreed and strongly disagreed that media is fair and 22.5% agreed/ strongly agreed that media is fair and remaining stayed neutral.

Figure 3: Count of Media is broadcasting more negativity

In figure 3 we can see that almost 63% of viewers agreed/ strongly agreed that the media is broadcasting more negativity and almost 34% of electronic media viewers disagreed/ strongly disagreed that media is not negative and broadcasting positive things. Whereas 21.3% of viewers stayed neutral.

Figure 4: Count of viewers get the motivation to fight with Covid-19 through what you see on TV

The data showed that people who are getting the motivation to fight with Covid-19 through what they see on TV are little less than the people who are not getting motivation through what they see on the television. Almost 37% of people are getting motivation and 44% are not agreed that they get motivation from television regarding Covid-19. Only 19.4% of viewers stayed neutral on this point.

Figure 5: Count of Media is working well in the area of Awareness campaigns

The results of data collection are showing that the awareness campaigns are working well as almost 55.6% of viewers have agreed and 27.6% disagreed that awareness campaigns are not doing well. This is positive feedback from viewers regarding awareness campaigns of Covid-19 in electronic media. 16.9%

of viewers remained neutral on this on point of the result.

Figure 6: Count of viewers think campaigns of electronic media are enough to make people aware of Covid-19

So as shown in figure 5 where people agreed that the awareness campaigns of the Corona virus are doing well but in figure 6 we can see that they are not enough. As we have results in figure 6 that 46.3% disagreed/ strongly disagreed and 33.7% agreed that the campaigns of electronic media are not enough to make people aware of Covid-19. Only 20% of viewers stayed neutral.

Figure 7: Count of viewers agree on what media tells about Covid-19

This graph illustrates that weather viewers agree on what media tell about Covid-19. The count of disagreed viewers is 37.6% and 33.8% agreed that they follow and believe in what the media tells about Covid-19. This is a very close result having almost 4% difference to be equal on both agreed and disagreed side. Here 28.7% of viewers remained silent/neutral.

Figure 8: Count of Pakistan Electronic Media is playing a positive role in Covid-19 coverage

While asking that Pakistan electronic media is playing a positive role in Covid-19 coverage, we saw that almost 39% of people disagreed and 36.3% agreed with it. We can see different areas in the data that we have collected where people showed some positive and negative responses so we can see where it is positive and negative. 23.7% of viewers of electronic media stayed neutral.

Figure 9: Count of viewers feel stressed/depressed when watching the news about the Corona Virus
This is the highest negative feedback from viewers that they feel stressed/depressed when they watch the news about Corona Virus. We can see in figure 9 that 39.4% agreed and 33.1% strongly agreed that they feel stress/depress and almost 14% of people are not feeling stress or depress when they watch news about the Corona virus in electronic media of Pakistan.

Figure 10: Count of viewers confused about the Corona virus as if it exists or not due to media reporting.
The result of viewers who get confused about the Corona Virus as if it exists or not due to media reporting is 37.5% who agreed and 15.6% have strongly agreed. The total percentage of viewers who are not confused and have disagreed to this point is 32.5%. More than half percent of viewers are confused about the Corona virus exists or not due to electronic media reporting.

Figure 11: Media Talk shows are playing a better role in telling the facts and figures about the Corona

virus.

We can see through the data collection showing in the chart that 48.2% of viewers disagreed and almost 30% disagreed that the media talk shows are playing a better role in telling the facts and figures about the Corona virus. Almost half of the viewers gave negative feedback about Talk shows related to Covid-19. 26.9% of viewers stayed neutral here.

Figure 12: Talk shows are helpful and spread positive awareness.

Talking about positive awareness coming from talk shows is helpful and positive feedback came from viewers but as the results of figure 11, the facts and figures about the Corona virus coming from media talk shows are not playing a better role. Almost 38% of viewers agreed and 36.2% do not agree that the talk shows are helpful and spread positive awareness. 25.6% of viewers stayed neutral on this point.

Figure 13: Count of viewers think media is more exaggerating the news related to Covid-19

This is another highest negative result we have received from viewers that they believe the media is more exaggerating the news related to the Covid-19. We can see 45.6% of viewers agreed and 20% strongly agreed. Only 13.1% have disagreed which is the lowest positive result. 21.3% of people stayed neutral on this point of research.

Figure 14: The information provided by media is authentic

Talking about the result of the authenticity of the information provided by electronic media, we can see in figure 14 that 40% of viewers disagreed and 17.5% agreed. This result has the highest outcome of neutral people. We can say that viewers are confused over it or they cannot judge properly that the information coming from electronic media is authentic or not. In other words, they may have not strongly believed in the authentication of information and felt better to stay neutral on this point of research.

There are some points that we got from participants through questionnaires where they have shared some points and views about the content of electronic media of Pakistan in reporting Covid-19 updates. Few comments came from participants are as follows.

- “Some media channels are reporting like it is the end of the world due to corona they spread fear and not sending positive vibes to the public”
- “Corona exists. We need to be careful. But its hype is too much”
- “Media should also show positive news not only emphasizing negative aspects and spread fear.”
- “Electronic plus social media both spread rumors that influenced the masses to a great instant.”
- “The media should be more authentic and helpful towards its people.”
- “Sometimes the media role is better and some time is not.”
- “Electronic Media plays a good role as well as a bad role in the COVID pandemic situation. Awareness campaigns help people to take precautions but on the other hand media 24/7 talking about the death that makes many people depressed.”
- “Pakistani electronic media is just there to give you depression”
- “Well, the media is free. And needs a strong check and balance”

5. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to study the sensationalism in the electronic media of Pakistan related to the Corona virus coverage. It was found that there are some points which show that electronic media has a strong impact on the viewers' mind. Electronic media has great influencing power but it is working more in a negative way. Through investigation of news coverage and by asking some questions we got to know that the Pakistani electronic media is not fair regarding Covid-19 news reporting. The electronic media is broadcasting more negativity and is exaggerating the news of the Corona virus due to which the viewers of electronic media are feeling stressed and depressed. The news coverage of natural calamities always remained negative for ages. They create so much hype about the calamity that it starts creating negative emotions and feelings on the viewer's mind. As it is a great influencing platform and has huge access to the people of different areas, it has responsibilities to educate people and remove fear and motivate people to fight with the calamity. It is affecting people very fast and it is important to spread awareness about the corona virus and motivate people that we can and we should combat this pandemic. The hype of fear is enough about corona virus whereas if we see the records of Covid-19 in the World

till September 2020 which shows

Active Cases

6,861,393

Currently Infected Patients:

6,800,862 (99%)

in Mild Condition

60,531 (1%)

Serious or Critical

Closed Cases

19,122,602

Cases which had an outcome:

18,260,033 (95%)

Recovered / Discharged

862,569 (5%)

Deaths

This shows that the positive outcome of the corona virus where recoveries and mild condition of patients are from 95% to 99% whereas the serious or critical condition and the death rate is from 1% to 5% only. As one of the objectives of this research gave the result through investigation that Television news reporting related to Covid-19 was not fair as most of the viewers have not agreed to the fairness of news reporting regarding Covid-19, it was more negative in the way of broadcasting news and was showing more negative aspects of Corona virus. It is found that even talk shows about Covid-19 are not playing the better role as they call non-professionals and are getting views, information, updates and discussing precautions and other technical issues from persons related to the entertainment industry or from social media influences i.e. TikTokers, Instagram Models, YouTubers, Vloggers, etc., instead of asking from biochemists, Doctors, Scientists, etc. that is why they were not playing a better role in telling facts and figures about the Corona virus and one of the main reason by which people are not believing and not taking the corona virus seriously. When non-technical discussion will be reported and non-serious attitude of electronic media will be seen by viewers as they are calling non-technical people for getting facts and figures and that content will be broadcasted and used by news programs then people will surely get confused about the Corona virus as if it exists or not. They will not believe resulting in more spread of the virus as they will not use precautions for Covid-19. The investigation showed that the awareness campaigns of the corona virus are having a better impact; it can be improved also for a better outcome. However, awareness campaigns are not enough. There should be more effective and well-planned campaigns on electronic media of Pakistan by which people get motivated to fight with the virus, aware of Covid-19 existence, removing or neutralizing fears, stress, depression, anxiety, take precautions, to remove confusions, and taking people to the side of positivity so that if they get the victim of Corona virus, they go for the hospital for better care.

6. Conclusion

The electronic media of Pakistan in coverage of natural calamities like Covid-19 is sensational as well as demotivating for the viewers. The electronic media is creating more fear through what they are reporting. Instead of removing fear from the viewer's minds. Some awareness campaigns are helpful for people but the campaigns are not enough as compare to negative reporting and exaggeration, sensationalism fear about the Covid-19 coming from electronic media. The electronic media is creating negative feelings on the mind of the young generation and elders, as they don't believe if even Corona exists or not. Viewers are not getting agreed to what is broadcasting on electronic media because of more negative reporting and fake news that they get from other forums without even checking the credibility of that news. The fear of the Corona virus is already there and instead of removing or neutralizing that fear to the point that people should believe in the Corona virus and take it seriously. Instead of running from it, they should get motivated and change their behaviors to the point that they should opt to fight with that virus and cure themselves according to the procedures instead of running or not believing in Covid-19.

7. Suggestions

7.1 Sensationalism

To remove fear, stress, depression, and negative feelings about the corona virus, PEMRA has to take part in enforcing its laws, rules, and regulations. The electronic media of Pakistan is not following the rules that they should follow. Some of the big media houses are following the traditional way of broadcasting and are selling more negativity as in many interviews journalists have said that 'we show what people demand'. People will see what the electronic media will show and when they show negativity and sensationalism regularly, it will become a culture for society. For example, when electronic media show some new fashion trends, later it becomes part of the society and culture. Media is an influencing platform, the forum which can make a good or bad culture and society. Media should follow its ethics, rules, and laws, not what people demand. Media creates a huge impact on viewers' minds.

When Media will follow the rules and laws given to them then sensationalism, negative reporting, exaggerations, fake news, and other negative points related to electronic media will automatically get removed.

7.2 Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns can create a better role to remove fear from the viewer's mind and create motivation to fight with the corona virus. The fear of Covid-19 is already there, creating more fear in the brains of viewers will only create stress, depression, and anxiety in viewers' minds. People get so much fear when they get to know that they are tested corona positive, they run from the hospital and doctors. The immunity level of patients decreases due to fear and depression due to exaggerated news of electronic media about Covid-19.

Effective awareness campaigns can be arranged from the patients who recovered from Corona Virus. We can arrange a setup where volunteers who recovered from Covid-19 can tell or aware people that how they felt and it is not that much dangerous, you just have to be motivated, take care of yourself, not to get fear, follow the instructions then it will be easier to be immuned and can fight with this calamity more easily and effectively. Recovered peoples story and how they fought with the virus can be shared with viewers so that they get the motivation to fight with Covid-19.

So instead of spreading fear through electronic media houses, we should spread positivity and motivation by which patients can agree to fight with the Corona virus instead of feeling stress, anxiety, and depression about Covid-19. There should be more effective and well-planned campaigns on electronic media of Pakistan by which people get motivated to fight with the virus, aware of Covid-19 existence, removing or neutralizing fears, stress, depression, anxiety, take precautions, to remove confusions, and taking people to the side of positivity so that if they get the victim of Corona virus, they go for the hospital for better care.

7.3 Fake news

There is a twitter account FakeNewsBusterMoIB (@FakeNews_Buster) running by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for exposing [fake news](#). This account should be used by all media houses to expose fake news and report authentic news. The government should make this twitter account 'Fake News Buster MoIB' more active and use this platform for exposing all fake news running by any of the media houses with the name and logo of that channel, journalist's name, program name and spread that message in public of Pakistan with help of awareness campaigns and show the name of the media house. By doing this media houses will become more active then they will confirm the news first and after authenticating the news report, they will broadcast it. Or else they have to face losses, negative feedback from the audience, low TRP, and will lack credibility in front of the public.

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