# Flood Of Fake News In Covid Era: Media Was Not Innocent, Only Intent Of Profit Earning

**Dr. Subhash Gupta[1], Himani Binjola[1], Vidushi Negi[1], Ankit Pal[2]**

[1]BJMC, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun.

[2]Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, Graphic Era Deemed to be University, Dehradun (ankitPal.phd@geu.ac.in)

**Abstract:**

In the times of misery and desolation of COVID-19 where the World was struggling against the deadly virus of COVID-19 and everyone was insolvent for survival. Another virus that was spreading more fear in pandemic times was the virus of fake news and misinformation. Humanity was standing at the threshold of mourning and torment and misinformation was adding on to the suffering of human in the hour of grief and anxiety. Media news culture which wanted to update the World with the latest trends and happening about the respective parts of the country was also becoming the platform for dissemination of disinformation and fake news. Through this study we are trying to understand that how fake news was spreading misinformation and fear among masses. Through this paper, we would be approximating such instances of fake news and misinformation.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Fake News, Misinformation, Corona Virus, Fear.

**Fake News in Covid Era:**

During the Corona period, so much lies were served on the media that thousands of people got into trouble. On one side there was the deadly corona virus and on the other side there was a plethora of misinformation. Accepting some misinformation as true and acting on it meant embracing death. This was the period when people scared of the fear of death were ready to accept any suggestion to save life, they themselves did not know what to do to save themselves and their loved ones? Instead of reducing this dilemma of millions of people all over the world, a section of the media worked to increase it further.

That is why the World Health Organization (WHO) termed fake news as more dangerous than the virus – **"We are not just fighting a pandemic; Rather, we are also fighting the false information being spread about this pandemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous."1** (Click, 2020)

With the increase in the number of patients of the deadly corona virus, it was not an easy task for journalists to find the truth. At every step, the danger of himself getting caught by this virus was looming on him. Challenges have to be faced by journalist at every stage, which they accept easily, but in the era of Corona, it is a difficult symbol. Difficult because till now whatever difficulties or challenges were there it was of social level but now family was also a part of it. It has become defy to step out of home safely and then coming back safely, Covid has actually scared every one of its presence. 2 (दृष्टिकोण, 202)

Amidst all such dangers, media played a very important role in conveying the truth to its readers and viewers and educating them to prevent from this epidemic. To a larger extent media played a very important role during Covid pandemic, but in this era of fear, a lot happened that the reputation of the media was at stake. During Covid, graph of deaths were increasing rapidly across worldwide and with this fear among common people was also increasing. Misinformation was fueling this fear. It was so worrying and dangerous that the government opened a front against those who spread fake news – "Government had already taken steps to take action against newspapers in Varanasi, Punj and Himachal Pradesh. The government had also said in the court that in an unprecedented situation like this pandemic, intentionally or unknowingly, publication or transmission of any fake or false news on print, electronic, social media or web portals would cause unnecessary panic among a large section of the society. Circumstances like outbreaks may arise."3 (Bhatnagar, 2020)

During the Corona period, fake news and misinformation were spreading so dangerously that it became a concern from the government to the Supreme Court. All the countries of the world were united to deal with such false information spreading rapidly like a virus. More than 180 countries of the world have made a different strategy to stop the adulteration of truth and falsehoods about Covid and correct information to reach to the general public. "India also issued a statement to deal with the manipulation of information related to Covid-19 epidemic. India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations tweeted, "We support Antonio Guterres' UN Communications Response Initiative "Verified" and urge to take global action to combat misinformation in this time of COVID-19 pandemic. 132 countries, including India, Australia, Chile, France, Georgia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mauritius, Norway and South Africa, have joined the initiative to provide fact-based content to address misinformation on the coronavirus and also focuses on what needs to be done for combating the same."4 (Times, 2020)

Amidst the fear of death, what is the truth behind false news that has become a cause of concern for most of the countries of the world? This is a question which is related to the identity of the media and also to the intention. Finding the answer to this question has become more important today because in any such dangerous times, whom to trust and whom not to? Then whose truth is to be considered as truth and whose statement is false? To find the answers to these questions, it is most important to understand that in a depraved

period, the spreader of false information as truth is taking any advantage by spreading illusion or whether they are so innocent that they really don't know what they are doing? (Times, 2020)

During this study, a fact came to the fore that in the initial phase of Covid, when most of the state governments and even journalists did not know much about Covid 19 and both this virus and disease were completely new to them. There was no vaccine available to prevent them, then due to lack of proper information and mutual co-ordination among the governments, half-baked information was spread among masses. This was the period when there was neither sufficient equipment for treatment nor medicines - "In the early days of the outbreak of the new corona virus in India, the first infected states, at their own level, used information and communication about this epidemic. The method was adopted according to its own accord. Whereas the central government could not make a clear policy till that time as to what kind of nationwide policy it has to make to deal with this epidemic. It is clear that the coordination between the central and state governments regarding this epidemic could have been better.5 (Mondkar, 2020)

After this, government became aware and the Central government along with providing all the information related to Covid on the government website, provided a platform to the people to avoid fake news and know the truth. - "There is no need to rely on fake news…. Any authentic information can be accessed through State Government or Central Government and information is also available on the website of the Ministry of Health. Awareness is essential to fight this infectious disease. "6 (Live, 2020)

Amidst the panic of Corona, the work of forgery of news and spreading fear did not happen inadvertently, but behind it many agendas were hidden. That's what Guy Berger, Director of the agency responsible for communications and information policies and strategies at UNESCO, believes, "It is a pity that some people have also misused this pandemic situation to spread propaganda to further their agenda: "The motives of spreading misinformation are many, including political motives, self-promotion and as a business model. Matters such as drawing attention to oneself."7  (News, 2020)

During the Corona period, the maximum number of false news, videos and pictures came on social media. Monica Bickert, Vice President of Content Policy at Facebook, an important part of social media, says – "Fake news is divided into two parts. Deliberately misleading people (Disinformation); and sharing of false news (misinformation) which can also happen unintentionally. There are often hidden financial motives behind deliberately spreading false news, and for this it is resorted to buying false accounts or 'Facebook Likes' to increase the reach of social media posts."8 (News, 2020)

This statement by a senior Facebook official shows that the architects of fake news see their advantage in this, but by sharing them, they may be contributing to spreading the poison of lies.

The exodus of lakhs of laborers from different states of the country to their home districts in difficult circumstances during the pandemic is also linked to the false and misleading news of the Corona period. The Supreme Court has also taken a jibe at such reports – a Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde and Justice L. Nageswara Rao issued the following directions: :"The exodus of workers in large numbers to the cities was the result of fear created by fake news that the lockdown would continue for more than three months. The exodus born of such fear has become a cause of untold suffering for those who believe and act on such news. Some people have even died in the process. Therefore, it is not possible for us to ignore the threat of these fake news being spread through electronic, print or social media. Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides for punishment to any person who creates or spreads false alarm or false alarm about the nature of the disaster or its severity or size. Such person shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year. 9 (Chowdhary, 2020)

In various parts of the media, print electronic media and social media spread the most false news and misleading information during the Corona period. Due to the fear of spreading the infection during that debauched period, many people clogged taking newspapers. Hence, more people were dependent on TV channels and social media. This was the period when the circulation of newspapers was reduced due to lockdown and advertisements were reduced and many institutions were being laid off. "The Indian newspaper industry, which continues to grow even in the face of declining readership across the globe, has been hit hard by Corona. Amit Goswami, a Kolkata-based newspaper distributor, told news agency ANI, "Our sales have dropped by 80 percent."10 (Ali, 2020)

Many newspapers were closed during the lockdown and a lot of layoffs were done – "Another journalist of the institute told that one day the editor and HR said by video conferencing that the company is in loss due to lockdown and therefore your services are being terminated. Huh. You take two months' salary and resign. The job loss in the media started shortly after the lockdown in March. A large number of journalists started being fired from different institutions."11 (Kamlesh, 2020)

Amidst the fear of Corona, false news also spread a lot of panic. The desire to serve their own interests by spreading lies, raising people's worries, troubles and panic was also not hidden – "The fear of corona virus remains among the people across the country. Meanwhile, these days many videos, photos and wrong data related to corona virus is being presented by WhatsApp, Facebook and many big media organizations. All these people are doing this with

the aim of increasing their followers and popularity in their TRP, advertisement and social media. 12 (News H. , 2020)

While social media intimidated and misled people by publishing and broadcasting photos and videos of some old or other place showing some other place related to Corona, many reputed newspapers and news channels were also found spreading lies. "Amidst the corona virus infection, the media gang is spreading rumors on half-baked information. Recently, the agenda of 'The …' was open in this regard and now it is the turn of the Express. In fact, on Wednesday (April 15, 2020), a news was published in the Express claiming that in view of religion, separate wards have been made for patients in Ahmedabad Civil Hospital. … But all these reports came under question when the Gujarat government rejected any such classification. The Health Department of Gujarat also issued a statement on its behalf completely rejecting this point. The health department said that no patient has been divided on religious grounds in the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital. Corona patients are being treated on the basis of their symptoms, their severity and on the recommendations of doctors "13 (INDIA, 2020)

It was not the only reputed newspaper that misled people by publishing news without verification. There are many such examples. Another reputed English newspaper created a sensation by publishing similar false news about a woman who had returned to Agra-"The … India report published on March 14, falsely claimed that a woman who travelled to Italy with her husband for her honeymoon, "tested positive for COVID-19" and then "fled to New Delhi and Agra" and that she resisted treatment. The report titled, 'Infected Techie's Wife, Who Fled B'luru Tests +ve' was published on March 14 on the front page of all editions of the paper and had quotes from health officials in Agra, the hometown of the woman. The … India report wrongly accused the woman of fleeing Bangalore and escaping quarantine. BOOM spoke to the brother of the husband who told us that the couple never travelled to Italy and also clarified that his sister-in-law is yet to test positive, unlike the claim made in Times of India. "The article is completely wrong and untrue. It has brought my sister-in-law and our family a lot of grief and stress, "he said." 14 (Niranjankumar, 2020)

The lack of resources with the media organizations and the reluctance to examine the facts in depth has also led to the dissemination of false and misleading information in the form of news in many cases. "Media-institutions neither have a comprehensive system to do this, nor are they inclined to do so. The work of our media institutions has been limited to collecting news related to political news, statements of politicians and debates and to ask some questions in press conferences "15  (Ranjan, 2020)

This study has found that during the Corona era, there have been cases of media slipping and losing public confidence in it, but the number of such misleading news in print and electronic media has been very less. During the Corona period, there were loads of lies on social media, due to which people had to suffer a lot and in many cases people became so scared that they

could not decide right and wrong. Many of such people even went to death. Those cases of giving misleading news can be taken as mere negligence, in which the reporter made the news without verifying the facts, but it is also negligence, then it is against the professionalism which scrutinizes every fact closely associated with it. Even if there is negligence like this, then it is very serious. In a sensitive matter like Corona, no such negligence can be forgivable. Apart from this, lack of proper resources and network for fact checking with many media houses has also been the reason for the inclusion of lies and false facts in the news. This lack of resources also cannot be considered an exemption to make a mistake. Incidents of broadcasting photographs and videos of another country and other incident in social media by linking them to Corona, tampering with photos and publishing false news to create confusion and fear by presenting fake documents as real, It is such a serious offense involving malignancy. There is a provision of punishment for this. The perpetrators of such an act of spreading lies as truth were well aware of what they were doing and how dire the consequences could be? Such people also used techniques to create and spread fake news. These people will not be called innocent in any way, but only criminals. It has been clearly revealed in the study that this crime has been committed with the intention of taking advantage in some form or the other. In the midst of all this, a very large section of the media, holding the torch of truth, brought the truth to the common man in the fight against Corona and for this, very honest journalists also laid down their lives. … many of them while performing their duty, lost to Corona and left this world. To salute such journalists, it is necessary that the black sheep entering the media should be separated.

**Reference:**

Paranjoy Guha Thakurta विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन (WHO) के महानिदेशक डॉक्टर टैड्रोस ऐडरेनॉम गैबरेयेसस काबयान। (2020) HTTPS://HINDI.NEWSCLICK.IN/MEDIA-AFTER-/COVID-WHY-WE-ARE-UNDER-A%2520NEW-EMERGENCY

Journalist DrishtiKon (2020) https://journalisviews.blogspot.com/2020/05/part-2.html

**दि प्रिंट (2020)** https://hindi.theprint.in/opinion/supreme-court-directive-to-media-institutions-on-covid-19-will-restrict-freedom-of-expression-coronavirus/127450/

NavBharat Times (2020) https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/india/india-supports-un-initiative-to-prevent-fake-news-related-to-kovid-19-epidemic/articleshow/76716547.cms

Ameya Mondkar (2020) HTTPS://WWW.ORFONLINE.ORG/ HINDI/RESEARCH/ COVID-19-CRISIS-AND-LACK-OF-COMMUNICATION-IN-INDIA-65146/ (24.04.2020)

**6855 | Dr. Subhash Gupta    Flood Of Fake News In Covid Era: Media Was Not Innocent, Only Intent Of Profit Earning**

SAMAY LIVE केंद्र सरकार के संयुक्त सचिव- स्वास्थ्य का बयान (2020) HTTP://WWW.SAMAYLIVE.COM/NATION-NEWS-IN-HINDI/416731/KOVID-19-540-NEW-CASES-MINISTRY-OF-HEALTH-SAID-TO-AVOID-FAKE-NEWS.HTML

UN NEWS,(2020) HTTPS://NEWS.UN.ORG/HI/STORY/2020/05/1025842

United Nation (2020) https://news.un.org/hi/story/2020/05/1025842

**परंजॉय गुहा ठाकुरता (2020)** Newsclick https://www.newsclick.in/

फ़ैसल मोहम्मद अली  की रिपोर्ट, बीबीसी हिंदी (2020)  https://www.bbc.com/hindi/ india-52054618

कमलेश की रिपोर्ट, बीबीसी न्यूज, (2020) https://www.bbc.com/hindi/india-52912127

HimDarshan (2020)https://www.himdarshan.com/news/2298-.aspx

Opindia, (2020) https://hindi.opindia.com/fact-check/media-fact-check/indian-express-fake-news-coronavirus-patients-segregated-religion-bias-hindu-muslim-gujarat/

BoomLive (2020) https://www.boomlive.in/coronavirustopstories/.....-misreports-agra-woman-fleeing-after-coronavirus-tests-7229

प्रमोद रंजन की रिपोर्ट, (2020) https://janchowk.com/beech-bahas/confusing-data-of-covid-middle-class-and-journalism/