

# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY DURING COVID-19-LOCKDOWN SITUATION

(An analytical study of the social media impact on individuals & society during the COVID pandemic)

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## ABSTRACT

*Social Media can be defined as those forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). As per wiki, Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Some of the most popular Social Media include – Facebook, Tiktok (presently banned in India), We Chat, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.,. Other famous platforms like Whatsapp, Telegram, Snap chat, Youtube, Zoom, Google meet, etc., are also off late deemed as part of Social Media. Users usually access social media services via web-based apps on desktops and laptops, or download services that offer social media functionality to their mobile devices (e.g., smartphones and tablets). Through Social Media, individuals, communities, and organizations share, co-create, discuss, participate and modify user-generated content or self-curated content posted online. This study paper deals with the role played by the Social Media in India in the situations prevailing on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and Lockdowns*

**KEYWORDS:** Pandemic, COVID-19, Lockdown, Social Networking

## COVID-19 AND LOCKDOWN

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered Corona Virus. Which took a shape of global pandemic effected large numbers of the people. It is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). A lockdown is an emergency protocol promulgated by Governments that prevents people from leaving a given area for a prescribed period of time.

## SOCIAL MEDIA'S INCREASED USAGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Social media buzz notably began buzzing mid-January with the initial news of the outbreak of the novel corona virus in Wuhan district of China. Pandemic updates followed by campaigns such as Karo Namaste, use of hand sanitizer and masks, to Safe Hands Challenge were also noted as triggers for social media uptick during the restricted living imposed during early March. With limited activity out of home, Indians are reportedly reading, contributing and influencing on social media. According to research agency Nielsen, the total volume of Covid-19 related conversations reached 22.3 million on March 24 in the country.

Unable to leave their homes, and in an effort to minimise isolation, many are relying social media to maintain their social connections. Market research firm Nielsen said social media volume saw a whopping 50X surge in the first week of March in India in the wake of Covid-

19 pandemic. A senior official of the firm noted that social media buzz picked up from 0.4 million in January and 1.6 million in February to a staggering 20.3 million in March first week. The number reportedly spiked simultaneously as corona virus cases jumped from just one in January to the over 500 in March. A recent report by data intelligence firm KalaGato shows that the average time spent on Facebook and Instagram went up by 62%, while TikTok (presently banned in India) saw a 44% surge, LinkedIn a rise of 27% and the time spent on Twitter increased by 34% between February 5 and March 29. The impact of Social Media on people increased to such extent that brands that have more essential products or a massive digital presence are pushing their ads on social media. Insurance companies, online gaming apps and online learning apps are some examples.

## THE UN-ARGUABLE AND DEEP IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING COVID-19

As seen from the statistics mentioned supra (in this article), there is a deep impact of Social Media on people. The role played by Social Media in these unprecedented circumstances has had Positive as well as negative impact on people. The impacts are discussed as under:

### Firstly, the Positive impact of Social Media

#### Spread of awareness on Do's & Don'ts during the COVID Scenario

Social Media has helped in spreading of awareness on Do's & Don'ts during the COVID Scenario. Right from sharing the information on the ways of Corona spread, social media played a large part in teaching people on – how to wear mouth masks, what type of masks to wear (like N95 Masks, Surgical Masks, etc.), how to wash hands properly, how to sanitize hands and surfaces, etc.,. The constant sharing of information in the Social Media has helped people to get aware of where and how the virus is spreading. The sharings on Social Media also taught people on eating those types of food that boosts immunity which could be useful in fighting out the virus if infected. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that the 'Arogya Sethu' app by the government of India has been very effective in bringing the information to the social media users.

#### **Platform for helping the needy**

Another important role played by Social Media during the COVID-19 pandemic/Lockdown scenario is that it helped many needy people by way of sharing the information. Facebook has collaborated with some of the biggest names in Indian entertainment to put together a home-to-home fundraiser concert, 'I for India'. The vision for the concert by leaders from the entertainment industry had three major objectives- to entertain those locked down in their homes, to pay tribute to those who are working on the frontlines, and to raise funds for those who have no work, no food and no home. Even at State/District/Town levels, people used to chat and share information on where people needed help which helped enthusiastic philanthropists/donors to offer timely help to those in need. Social Media has helped many NGOs to raise funds for helping people affected with COVID-19/Lockdown.

#### **Effective Mass Communication**

Under the COVID-19/Lockdown scenario, social media has played a vital role in bringing people together virtually. People stranded in various parts of the globe are able to meet and talk (virtually) through social media applications like Whatsapp, Snap chat, Skype, etc.,. Even companies have conducted virtual meetings/webinars using applications like Zoom, Google meet, Cisco WebEx meetings, etc.,. Many religious programs/worship services also are conducted by using social media applications like Facebook live, Youtube live, etc.,. With the ease of accessibility of the internet and social media platforms, companies (to some extent governments) have introduced and adopted the **concept of work from home. OTT (Over the Top media)** platforms have become the new mainstream source of the internet. Albeit the pandemic has shut down cinema halls, there has been no major impact on the entertainment front. Though it is not possible for people to go out and watch movies, they are discovering the joy of sitting at home and binge-watching web series and movies. According to a report, there has been a 20% increase in viewership of Digital Media since the beginning of March. This spike was first

witnessed in cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru, but was subsequently seen in other cities as well.

#### **Positivity from Motivational posts**

Many researches have concluded that COVID-19/Lockdown scenario has increased depression and has also caused serious mental illness among people. This issue of depression/mental illness under the COVID scenario is discussed under the negative impacts of social media. However, the same social media has played a significant part in de-escalating the depression levels among people. As the recent lockdown may prove daunting on our physiological and psychological well-being, due to lack of social mingling, outdoor and office routine, many famous celebrities and normal people across the globe are sharing motivational posts on the social media platforms to help people remain positive and inspired during the pandemic. A few days back, veteran Bollywood actor-filmmaker Satish Kaushik released a motivation video on Twitter, in which he was seen singing the song 'When life gives you banana' to motivate people and stay positive during the lockdown. "There is despair, sadness, sense of loss everywhere. Should we succumb to this pressure? To answer the question here is a light-hearted, inspiring song, 'When Life Gives U A Banana', Kaushik wrote on the social media platform. Recently, superstar Shah Rukh Khan had posted a song titled 'Sab Sahi Ho Jaayega' from his Twitter handle, sending out positivity and hope to everyone amid the lockdown. The song was sung by SRK himself.

#### **Academic learning tool**

Under the COVID-19/Lockdown scenario, social media has played a crucial role in keeping the learning curve of students moving up. The nationwide lockdown following the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a burst of activity with online education. The HRD Ministry's platforms such as SWAYAM and the National Digital Library have seen a five-fold increase in daily traffic during the first week of lockdown. The HRD Minister, Ramesh Pokhriyal, has encouraged educational institutions to embrace online education to the extent possible. In the metros, private schools appear to have taken the lead in switching over to online classes. However, many teachers and students are still grappling with the digital transition. Universities too have pointed out that they are not ready and that many of their students do not have access to the Internet.

#### **Second on the discussion is the negative impact of Social Media, which is analysed below**

##### **Increased cyber-crimes**

While social media is used by many for constructive purposes, there are some mischievous people who are using social media platforms as tools for their clandestine activities.

These fraudsters use social media platforms to steal personal information by hacking, spreading soft-ware viruses etc.,. Deceiving people by luring them of monetary benefits has become a major cyber-crime. Cybercrime has breached social media networks, thanks to both increased users and increased use. Hackers look for opportunities to gain access to people's accounts, personal or financial information, typically through suspicious links or download. Cybercrime does not only involve hacking or virus attacks. When the computer is used as a weapon for pornography, cyber terrorism, fraud, violations, and so on, it is nothing less than a cybercrime. The Bois Locker Room Case highlighted the misogyny in society. Teenagers being involved in such heinous crime only show the plight of schools and homes where rampant sexism is ignored. The screenshots of the Bois Locker Room page on Instagram is the epitome of severe exploitation of social media. The incident is the reflection of a much larger societal problem. The social media or digital media has become a platform for acting adulthood and contrive outrageous crimes like fostering rape culture.

#### **Mis-Information on COVID-19**

#### **Mis-information relating to COVID-19 shared in social media is of 2 types**

One is regarding the Do's and Don'ts relating to the Corona virus and the second is regarding spreading fake news. In the first case, people are spreading information on the Do's and Don'ts of corona virus with limited knowledge or information received from un-authorized sources. One of the major mis-information spread in the beginning was that corona virus is contracted by eating chicken/mutton. This mis-information spread so rapidly that many people stopped eating non-vegetarian. There are certain shares in social media which suggested that eating specific varieties of leaves would prevent contracting corona virus. Recently in Tamilnadu, there was a funny spread in social media which suggested that eating a kind of sweet (mysore-pak) would heal corona virus/prevent contracting the virus. Of course, action was taken by police against the people behind spreading of such rumours. But to conclude, social media has been a primary source of communication of mis-information leading people to chaos and confusion. The second type of spreading of mis-information is a deliberately planned/intentional spread of news in social media to defame some targeted groups or people. During this COVID-19/Lockdown period, Social media has become a hub for the spread of mis-information either done intentionally or out of ignorance/over-enthusiasm.

#### **Impetus for un-common libido**

Another important and some-what alarming negative impact of social media is the spread of content serving as impetus for un-common libido. There is a phenomenal rise in the demand for products like adult sex toys, condoms in the

sexual wellness industry. This surge in sales by saying that this surge in enquiries and sales of products on the site is a direct relation to people staying at home, running out of routine and looking to experiment with new and creative options. As per the statement given by the Kerala police, increase in online material on child sexual abuse came to their notice during a digital analysis conducted by the Kerala police. In-depth probe found that many social media groups, with over 200 members each were found sharing such pictures.

#### **Causative factor for Anxiety & Depression**

Random studies have shown that social media has been one of the causes for depression and anxiety among people. In what has been described as the most challenging crisis since the Second World War, millions of young people are faced with daily uncertainty and major disruption in their routine, education, social and economic lives. This could potentially have a significant impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The continuous shares in Social media on the issues relating to COVID/Lockdown are causing people to think more on the possible devastating effects of COVID and lose hope about the future. Studies have shown that continuous/sustained exposure to terrifying information on COVID/Lockdown causes serious mental problems.

#### **Possible lack of privacy**

During the COVID-19/Lockdown scenario, many digital solutions like dashboards, contact-tracing apps and data analytics models are being used to better predict and control the infection spread. *TikTok* has emerged as the most downloaded social media app amid the 21-day lockdown due to Coronavirus in India. As per a report by *AppAnnie*, *TikTok* has managed to dethrone *WhatsApp* and *Facebook* in terms of the number of app downloads in the country. As per the report, *WhatsApp* stands second in line followed by *Facebook* and *Helo*, an app that has the same parent company as *TikTok*- Byte Dance. Ed-Tech tools for remote learning, ICT tools that enable remote working, and many others have gained wide adoption. Social media users are downloading and using many applications (to overcome boredom) without verifying the security aspects. Users of these tools have many un-answered queries on the security of their personal data provided in these applications. Digital dashboards and contact tracing apps acquire data from users through self-reporting. They collect way more privacy-intrusive information than required, like location, profession, etc., violating the core privacy principle of data minimisation. With hordes of data gushing into digital systems, privacy concerns are centred around how much control users have over their data, which parties have access to it, to whom it is disclosed (confidentiality) and how it is used (transparency). It is known to all that the Government of India banned *TikTok*, *Helo* and 57 other apps for security concerns.

Therefore, lack of protection to privacy is a major concern with social media.

### CONCLUSION

It is an indisputable fact that social media is playing a major role in society today. Especially in this COVID-19/Lockdown scenario, its prominence has grown multi-fold. It is both useful and harmful. In other words, it has the ability to have both positive and negative impacts on the society in general and more particularly on its users and other stakeholders. The kind of impact it shows on the society depends entirely on the way it is handled/used, the persons handling it, the purpose(s) for which it is used and the restrictions governments/authorities impose on its users.

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