

## **Media Framing of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indian Print Media: A Content Analysis of Editorials in The Times of India, The Indian Express and Hindustan Times**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Individual awareness of the disease and adherence to preventative measures are essential for a successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early media portrayals of COVID-19 health information may have an impact on public attitudes and behavior. To urge people to respond correctly, the media should ensure that its coverage is relevant, timely, and actionable. We looked at internet reportage in India to see how well the media conveyed health information regarding COVID-19 by WHO's Strategic Risk Communication standards. Sixty-seven percent of publications that cited sources of information did so from reliable sources, including public health agencies and scholars. In addition, media coverage did not appear to reflect WHO changes promptly, with most of the material coming before the updates. According to the results, Indian media should focus on actionable and relevant news that gives individual reaction recommendations. To combat the spread of disinformation, the media should report on evidence-based preventive and treatment methods.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, WHO, Evidence-Based Preventive, Public Attitudes, Strategic Risk Communication

### **INTRODUCTION**

The discovery of the novel coronavirus was initially reported in Wuhan, China, late in 2019. [1] However, it was only a few months after which the outbreak shook the global community leading to an announcement of a public health emergency worldwide by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on January 30, 2020. The organization identified the virus as SARS-CoV-2 and officially named the disease it causes coronavirus disease or COVID-19. Although the newly emerged virus imposes a severe threat to all nations, the earlier history of outbreaks had resulted in pandemic preparedness plans crafted by WHO as early as 2005. [2] Such planning has explicitly emphasized the importance of effective media communication for public health officials in tackling and managing an emergent infectious disease or an avian influenza outbreak and even large-scale natural disasters such as the tsunami. Research suggests that from scientists to the general masses, all receive information, accurate or inaccurate, regarding health and developments in medicine primarily by news stories. A recent study observes that health journalism in mainstream media hugely shapes the representation of the world while also boosting health practices amongst the masses. In addition to this, a strong relationship between media's ability in shaping public discourse and also prompting government policy-making is agreed upon in scholarly works. However, the source of health reporting is noted to be derived from findings of contemporary research and individual health professionals, which are to be delicately dealt with along with issues of insufficient training of journalists and deadline constraints on producing stories that impede the generation of reliable sources health news. The finding is supported in later research where specialized health journalists are seen to be more efficient in imbibing nuanced input in news stories about the issue of vaccines which is suggestive of more reliability for readers casting an informed choice on evolving subjects such as vaccinations which constitute to be one of the many that surround a pandemic. [3] Further, opinion pieces or editorials of a newspaper are agreed to be positioned as a space to express opinions and have underlying factors of selectiveness in portraying a subject strongly supporting the possibility of numerous components of information of such communicative text. Further, newspaper leanings are also suggested to be decisiveness in shaping the notion of a pandemic. [4] Additionally, empirical research also suggests how editorials of a newspaper play a constructive role in framing public opinion on an issue, right from the beginning of an event necessitating the need to study the coverage of the pandemic in such articles disseminated by newspapers to comprehend media communication.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Communication via mass media is essentially critical for the public in encountering large-scale health disasters. In terms of such risk communication, mass media has been found to shape public opinions and is suggested to have a crucial role for effective communication during a novel coronavirus pandemic. [5] It is considered that health stories can serve various purposes. Still, their accountability greatly lies in

communicating enormity of threat, its symptoms, and submitting actions to reduce the risk of contraction by it to the readers. A responsible role of the media is also studied to be supportive of 'critical public health literacy' amongst people in scholarly work. Increasing the number and quality of health-related stories in local newspapers has potential to uplift the audience's knowledge and literacy about health issues.

The sources selected by media for news stories determine the public's response in a situation, even in a global public health emergency, by laying distinct viewpoints aiding the individual decision-making process. [6] Additionally, the media messaging of the Zika virus in the United States in a study showcased a subsequent meltdown gradually with the probable consequence of reduced information to the general public regarding the outbreak. Moreover, the mass media's role is considered decisive in molding public perception and their conduct chiefly where there exists a lack of awareness or no history of encounter such incidence with them, and this renders the media's role in the novel coronavirus disease, which has culminated in a global outbreak, more crucial.

### **Pandemics and the Media**

In terms of influenza pandemics, media is instrumental in forming community risk perceptions. Research suggests that newspapers stand to be among the most favored sources of information during a pandemic catastrophe. [7] The usage of traditional media reflects effective protective behavior in dealing with a pandemic and the public's knowledge of the outbreak. During such an emergency, health professionals struggle to communicate risks, thus increasing the importance of media stories.

Media's construction of an issue is largely described in scholarly works of Entman [8], who conceptualized the method of framing involving categories of selection and salience, which are inherent in any media text and enforce the communicative power translating as an influence on the public. Journalists' information of news stories deploys the technique. The theory also applies aptly in a public crisis, where media is the primary source of information, thus having an indispensable role in appropriate classification and presentation of the root issue. Further, such potent impact is also exercised by the media in representing or framing a pandemic.

In a study of Dutch media coverage of the H1N1 pandemic, different frames were adopted by media, which were noticed to be constantly changing for defining the crisis depending on the degree of severity associated with it. Such thematic framing of pandemic news stories is considered a conscious decision made by journalists. It is also seen to influence attitudinal and behavioral outlook in times of a highly transmissible infectious disease.

The media's positive effect in reducing the number of infections at an epidemic equilibrium is substantiated by devising a mathematical model. The increase in coverage is directly correlated with completely nullifying the epidemic. [9] Similarly, a study in the context of H1N1 pandemic perception among Northwestern University students justified news media as a source for outbreak information while significantly encouraging vaccination intent in the respondents.

Further, in an emerging infectious disease, extensive media coverage is studied to limit the severity of such disease outbreaks and persuade public behavior. Studies on coverage of the Ebola outbreak and H1N1 pandemic in Nigerian and UK newspapers respectively positively suggested dispensation of responsible communication on the media, where UK newspapers' coverage could also appropriately convey scientific uncertainty. [10] Similarly, a framing study of Canadian media outlined the promising role of the country's media in representing the obesity epidemic as a challenging issue over five years, presenting it as an opportunity that could be resolved with a constructive effort from stakeholders, particularly from individuals and the government.

### **Issues with Health Reporting**

The domain of health reporting is often criticized for over-hyping issues, particularly those subjected to diseases. [11] Such criticism is also attributed to mass media for reporting on diseases in the emerging health hazards category. In times of a global health outbreak, inducing the right health choices in public remains a challenge for the media. The reportage on health is also questioned for being censored by the government or used as a carrier of messages by state authorities. The general media is also seen to lack in providing accurate information of recently developed treatments to audiences and inputting absolute and relative risks aptly in news stories. Medical reporting is also suggested to adopt an evidence-based approach for quality improvement.

A study on the coverage of past outbreaks as SARS depicts how different media outlets reported the disease, with some being highly centralized by governmental machinery resulting in reports in consent with the national measures in China. [12] Almost half of the news reports regarding the opioid epidemic promoted stigmatization in the masses due to the usage of certain words in the United States. A content analysis study on the construction of death in the Times of India during H1N1 influenza. This reveals that even though the issue witnessed heavy reporting, news stories still endured incompetency in highlighting the lack of medical emergency procedures. A study on the coverage of Kenyan newspapers on the HIV epidemic also portrays a grim scenario with evident gaps in detailed information on the outbreak in articles.

The framing technique of reporters has frequently attracted criticism for adopting alarmist frames in news stories in a pandemic crisis. [13] Further, different health-related issues such as an outbreak and disaster demand

best practices of communicating new knowledge, the evolution of the event, suggesting action, and others from reporters, which is unevenly distributed in health news stories limiting the readers' awareness. Media has also been observed to shift the focus of a crisis making foundational issues irrelevant due to starkly different framing throughout the years, as study regarding the opioid crisis in Canadian print media.

Further, the role of journalists to consult experts in terms of risks and uncertainties to curate more comprehensive news stories is also identified as such text significantly shape public understanding of health issues. In contrast, other research has shown heavy reliance on press releases as a major source for health reporting or on health professionals/experts thereby cautioning journalists of issue of conflict of interests which may arise from such sources.

The disproportionately less number of trained health beat journalists or complete absence of training mechanisms in newsrooms is also seen as a setback in quality reporting. For these same reasons, poor reporting of the Ebola outbreak had been seen to be caused. [14] However, in an Iranian study, a major impediment in receiving health-related information for even specialized health journalists is a lack of necessary communication from health officials. Research also suggests collaborations between public health officials and journalists for ensuring successful risk communication outreach to the public in emergencies.

### **The Current Crisis**

The recent research on reporting on coronavirus in Chinese media found news reports on covid-19 to not align on a real-time basis reducing the function of media to sensitize the public. Research on the sentiment analysis of major news media organizations headlines has revealed that negative framing surrounded the pandemic news. [15] Another cross-cultural study of American and Chinese newspaper articles suggests foregrounding different issues in both the papers creating both implicit and explicit meanings of media writings. Similarly, a schemata analysis of articles from the *New York Times* from the United States and the *Global Times* from China revealed adherence to separate political ideologies in the respective papers in shaping the pandemic in the press while carrying a negative discourse. Further, another research of eight newspapers points out the labeling of coronavirus in news stories differing based on location harnessing a different social construct of meaning regarding the virus across papers for its audiences.

A recent study on the global media coverage of the pandemic in eight media outlets from the Americas reveals that the crisis is subjected to vast fear-mongering about the virus with the direct onus of evolving public perception of the pandemic on the media. [16] Another study of Nigerian newspapers reportage on coronavirus displayed huge coverage helping in containing the virus where positive audience response reinforced the concept of the big influence of media on public's behavior. Similarly, another recent study on Greece's citizenry advocates a strategy of effective communication from public health officials and traditional media as the way forward.

However, according to the analysis by the Computational Propaganda Project [17] of English news outlets supported by state authorities in China, Iran, Russia, and Turkey, the politicization of the health issue and fostering of fostering of unverified theories regarding the birth of coronavirus is revealed. Similarly, another research on the coverage done by right-leaning media in the United States has reflected misinformation about the origins and treatment methods, resulting in labeling official sources as government health agency information as exaggerating the disease in audiences. Similarly, an analysis of news media videos further substantiated that reporting could not dispense the role of actively informing the audience for protective behavior.

Ethnicisation of the outbreak is also identified as a significant factor in the language of media coverage, and negative perception about Chinese and Indonesian heritage individuals is also suspected due to improper media coverage. [18] In terms of positive action, recent research analyzing media reports from December 2019 to March 2020 suggests that global news media had rigorously covered the outbreak intimating the readers of the threat much before WHO formally labeled the emergency like a pandemic.

A study on risk perception and knowledge of the pandemic in more than 480 pharmacists validated the role of media as a source of information and a catalyst for developing an attitude for dealing with the pandemic.

While earlier research has also suggested increasing exposure to news for greater accessibility of information to improve the public's preparedness to a health threat., all of which, together, advocates for increasing responsibility quotient in journalistic functions. In the Indian context, the most recent study on the analysis of the epidemiological display of coronavirus in five vernacular newspapers in the State of Karnataka gave insight into the successful awareness reporting done by the print media [19].

Further, studies indicate that a pandemic is suggested to fit into the rubric of most news values ranging from relevance to uncertainty and others, making it a special story comprising a concentrated coverage by the media. The media attention for reportage on a pandemic is also sustained for a long duration as it absorbs elements such as proximity and national relevance, building studies on local perspectives as prominent.

Hence, this study seeks to address the gap in reviewing the covid-19 pandemic coverage by regional news media and assess the possible factors influencing media framing and the impact.

**Objectives of the study**

The media coverage of the covid-19 pandemic in the traditional news sources demands an analysis as it is responsible for both crisis communication and forming risk perceptions in the audiences, thus becoming relevant. With this aim, the research is guided by the following objectives:

- (i). the Main objective: To investigate the media framing of the covid-19 pandemic in Indian newspapers
- (ii). Sub-objectives:

- To find out dominant frames adopted in the news media’s editorials during the coronavirus crisis; and
- To examine the relationship between the nature of experts and the tone employed in the editorials

**METHODOLOGY**

To understand the choice of subjects and characteristics involved in editorials/opinion pieces, a content analysis approach was undertaken for this study deriving from a coding mechanism. The content analysis method is taken for both reasons of understanding the media text and deducing interpretation from it. The basis of such analysis has been the framing theory for this study. Largely explored in the works of Entman [20] and later worked on by other scholars, the concept of framing suggests that media text involves the selection of a subject and its presentation in a specific way, which eventually influences public perceptions. This manner of choosing what to put and how to display it is enjoyed in editorial writings in print news media. The efficiency of editorials thus is considered based on the way opinions are expressed in it, how the arguments are balanced, whether reliance on evidence is placed or not. It does it engage in presenting contrasting viewpoints while also attempting to submit reconciliation since it is involved in shaping opinions of readers and policymakers. While media content analysis is also accepted to be a reliable way of understanding policy discourses, many scholars have also considered framing as the appropriate theoretical framework for the content analysis of an epidemic's media coverage.

*Coding mechanism*

As per the works of Entman, the content analysis for frames has been adopted for this study. The scholar has suggested four identifiers, viz., defining the problem, identifying the causation factors, then forming moral decisions, and lastly, [21] laying resolutions as the functions of frames. Communicators of any given media text implicitly and explicitly imbibe such framing for emphasizing certain issues. This necessitates the presence of dominant frames in any journalistic piece. Hence, deriving from Robert Entman’s work, a coding mechanism was worked upon. Through the initial reading of the articles, an operational definition had been devised with frames that have been identified. Through a subsequent reading, the coding sheet had been revised with more exhaustive definitions. Seven codes were identified through a deductive reasoning approach for analyzing the sample of articles from selected newspapers.

This study, thus, has adopted information appeal, criticism, appraisal, politicization, media, solutions, and hope as the frames to understand the opinion pieces disseminated in the news media for deconstructing the media coverage.[22]Following the review of literature, the study also examines the role of individual contributors in informing the public and, moreover, the efficacy of media in providing remedial solutions to issues concerning the pandemic.

Sr. No.	Codes	Operational Definition
1.	Informational appeal	Providing input on the emergence of the virus, which's notifications, the global order, tackling misinformation and explanation of pandemic induced issues such as unemployment, economic consequences, migrant crisis & adversity of vulnerable groups.
2.	Criticism	Citing central govt.'s and/or the opposition's ineffectiveness in communicating risks with the masses, testing, hospitalization, lockdown restrictions, policy front with China, and highlighting data gaps.
3.	Appraisal	Appreciation of central or state govt.'s policies/management of the pandemic.
4.	Politicization	Commenting on disputes between political parties, leaders or drawing comparisons from the history of political parties as a factor for mismanagement of the crisis.
5.	Media	Attributing media's role, responsibilities, and/or shortcomings during the pandemic.
6.	Solutions	Suggesting measures in dealing with the virus and aligned issues of economic crisis etc. either on individual or govt. Level or both.
7.	Hope	Exploring post-covid world opportunities, growth predictions of the economy and/or different sectors.

*Sampling*

The three-month time frame for analyzing the articles for the study was identified beginning from April 1, 2020-30<sup>th</sup> June, 2020, as the first lockdown imposed across the country was announced on March 24, 2020, which became one of the first formal acceptance of the pandemic crisis in the country.

The three selected newspapers are viz., The Times of India, The Indian Express, and Hindustan Times. These newspapers were selected on the basis of high circulation figures from the Indian Readership Survey, 2019. [23] Out of these, Sunday special pieces were identified for the purpose of this study. Such articles included opinion pieces and excluded interviews. Thus, a total of 195 articles were identified for the analysis as a sample. On another review of the sample, **Table 1: Code-sheet developed for the analysis**

An inductive approach was deployed for examining the tone of the piece and the nature of the expert writing it. Table 1 shows the code-sheet developed for the analysis. Hence, an inductive coding scheme (along with the help of a coding guide) was added for analysis for knowing the communicators involved and understanding the relationship between the author of the piece and the tone of such writing. The coding involved experts defined as (1) journalists, (2) authors, (3) politicians, (4) industry professionals, and (5) health care officials, whereas the tone for an article was characterized into three components, viz., in favor of the government, in opposition of the government or being neutral.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

A content analysis of 195 media opinion pieces published on Sundays, particularly those with a by-line, was done across the sample of the three newspapers. Since such special articles are both longer in length and require more in-depth analysis, these were selected for understanding the representation of the pandemic and the policy discourse around the same.

The newspaper copies were digitally acquired and cross-checked with the Factiva database for the duration of three months. [24] The papers have editorial pieces on the subject of the coronavirus heavily in the three-month duration of this study, requiring an exhaustive interpretation of the media texts.

Table 2 and Figure 2, which are laid below, are used to comprehend how the opinion pieces were written on the crisis and in what manner the framing patterns of the issue took place in the three most read newspapers in the city. [25] Collected data from the table suggests that the print media took due cognizance of the health emergency by rigorously framing the issue in the opinion pieces with 195 articles on it during the time period of this research. However, the articles were almost equally divided between providing information on the pandemic and critiquing state and central governments’ policy measures. The foremost frame used in the print medium has been the information appeal comprising 59 (30.96%) of the total 195 articles.

However, evidently, *The Times of India* had the most number of opinion articles with an informational appeal of construing the pandemic accounting for 26 (33.33%) of the total pieces in the paper. This frame is then followed by the *Hindustan Times* 15(28.85%) and lastly by *The Indian Express* 18(27.65%). The second major dominant frame is criticism resulting in 58 (29.74%) of the total pieces. Interestingly, *The Indian Express* leads for this frame with the highest number of articles amounting to 24 (36.92%) of all the 65 articles the paper comprised. The criticism frame was then adopted by *The Times of India* 20 (25.64%) followed by *Hindustan Times* 14 (26.92%).

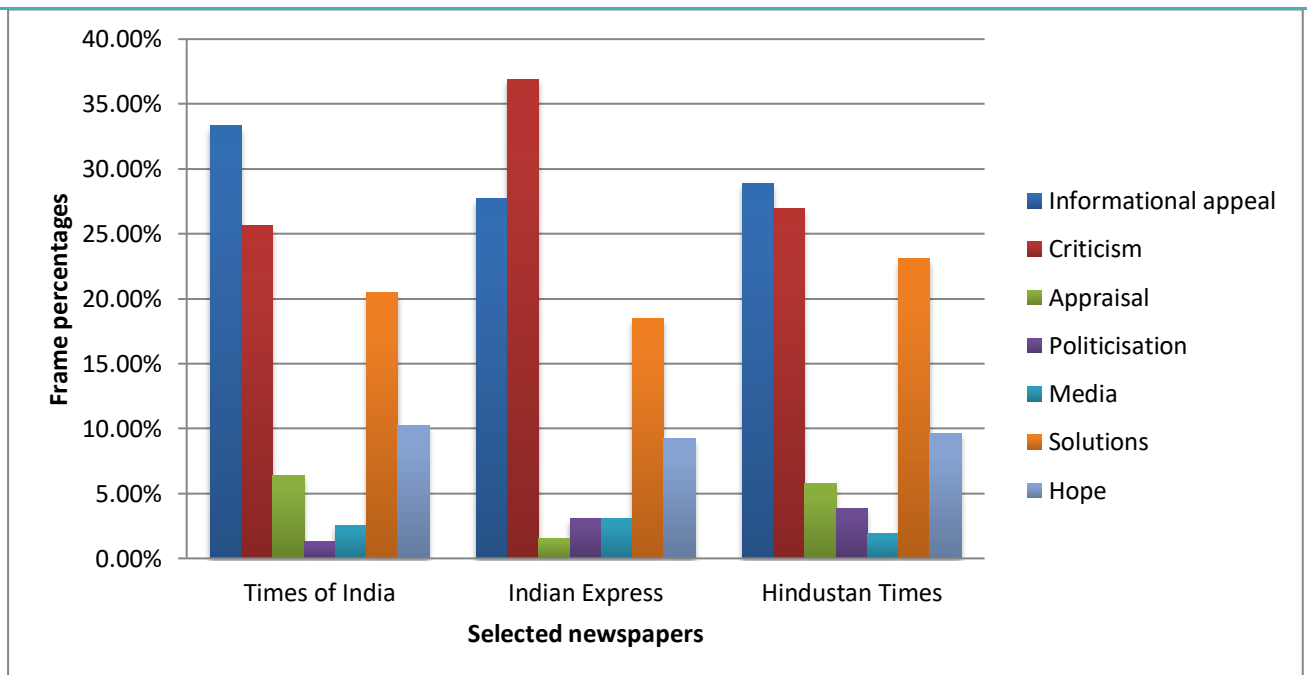
The third dominant frame from the category is solutions which credit for 40 (20.51%) articles of the total. The *Hindustan Times* is the frontrunner in having a solutions frame quantifying 12(23.08%) articles, whereas *Times of India*, even with 16 (20.51%) articles, has given less weightage to the frame in comparison with its overall opinion pieces. Similarly, *The Indian Express* too has not adhered attention to the solutions frame with 12 (18.46%) articles from its total coverage.

Other codes constitute to be: hope frame 8 (10.26%), appraisal 5 (6.41%), media code 2 (2.56%), and politicization 1 (1.28%) for *The Times of India’s* articles. For, *The Indian Express*, the remaining codes culminate as hope 6 (9.23%), politicization 2 (3.08%), media 2 (3.08%), and appraisal frame 1 (1.54%) in its pieces. The *Hindustan Times* comprises of the hope frame 5 (9.62%), appraisal 3 (5.77%), politicization 2 (3.85%), and media 1 (1.92%) in the totality of its special pieces.

**Table 2.** Distribution of frames across the sample

	Informational appeal	Criticism	Appraisal	Politicization	Media	Solutions	Hope	Total
Newspapers								
<i>The Times of India</i>	26	20	05	01	02	16	08	78
<i>The Indian Express</i>	18	24	01	02	01	12	06	65
<i>The Hindustan Times</i>	15	14	03	02	01	12	05	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>195</b>

The tone of the piece	Nature of the expert					Total
	Journalist	Author	Politician	Industry Professional	Healthcare official	
<b>The Times of India</b>						
Favor	07	02				09
Against	17	07		01		25
Neutral	29	12	01	01	01	44
<b>The Indian Express</b>						
Favor					01	01
Against	13	05	14	01		33
Neutral	10	02	14	05		31
<b>Hindustan Times</b>						
Favor	05		02	03		10
Against	11	05				16
Neutral	17	02		07	01	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>195</b>



**Figure 2.** Percentages of frame distribution

Table 3 represents the inductive coding applied to each paper across the editorials in Sunday specials. [26] As discussed earlier, the three components involved the interpretation of the media messages in the opinion pieces in favor of the state or central government, against

**Table 2. Inductive coding**

the government or being neutral. Further, to analyze the nature of experts, five categories were drafted.

The analysis reveals that the majority of writers of the opinion pieces are journalists accounting for 109 (55.90%) articles. The *Times of India* leads with 53 (67.95%) of its articles written by journalists. Following this, *Hindustan Times* accounts for 33 (63.46%) dedicated writings by journalists, whereas the *Indian Express* comprises 23 (35.38%) articles by journalists.

However, the tone of opinion pieces by journalists in the *Indian Express* majorly accounts for being against the government with 13 (56.52%) articles in contrast to the *Times of India*, where the bulk of writings by journalists consist of 29 (54.72%) articles carrying neutral tone.

Similarly, authors and politicians encompass the next most natures of the experts used in the opinions piece, with each 34(17.44%) and 31(15.09%) articles, respectively. The *Times of India* involves the most authors with 21 (26.29%) of its articles, where the majority of them with 12 (57.14%) articles contain a neutral tone. The *Hindustan Times* carries 6 (11.54%) of the opinion writings by authors, while the *Indian Express* represents 7 (10.77%) of articles by authors. On the contrary, the third most deployed expert for the opinion writings are politicians for which the *Indian Express* indicates the 28 (43.08%) pieces authored by them in which both against the government and neutral tones accrued equal weightage. However, the *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* fetch quite a few writings by politicians in comparison. It is noteworthy that across all the selected three papers, the least number of experts are health professionals with only 3 (1.54%) articles. Such expert writings would have elicited different ways to manage the pandemic and further shape the policy discourse around a vital subject as public health, which, as per the results of the analysis, seems missing.

The results necessitate the existing relationship between the nature of the expert and the tone of the article in framing the issue of a pandemic where these characteristics are seen to be distinct across the sample of selected newspapers.

## **DISCUSSION**

The main purpose of this study has been to examine the media framing of the coronavirus pandemic in the print media while aiming to understand the discourse of the subject through the relationship between the author of special editorials/opinion pieces framing the crisis and the perception being constructed of the health emergency thus inducing policy action. The findings of this research suggest that the news media sufficed its charge of meticulous coverage of the issue considering the proximity and national relevance of the outbreak. The analysis of the articles could be done by exploring various themes as per the framing theory, and hence, seven frames were applied to the selected writings of the sample, viz., informational appeal, criticism, appraisal, politicization, media, solutions, and hope. The identification of the frames was further validated with the inclusion of mutually exhaustive and exclusive definitions as part of the coding scheme. The dominance of the informational appeal necessitates the role of performing risk communication that involved explaining the pandemic, major announcements, and, more importantly, informing the public of the crisis-induced issues with regularity. This dispensation of responsibility aligns with other works by scholars. The second frame to attract the most media attention has been the criticism frame. The existing preference of this frame shapes the criticism offered on policy or governmental measures in dealing with the pandemic or its issues that emerged as a consequence of it. The dominance of the criticism frame is suggestive of a negative discourse shaping around crisis management. This finding aligns with the earlier research performed on the changing nature of an epidemic influencing reporting styles to the extent of causing displacement of fundamental issues. In terms of suggesting remedies for dealing with a crisis, solutions emerged as the third dominant frame. While developing risk perception precautionary behavior through media in such a crisis, the media is expected to provide detailed analysis on remedies or self-efficacy. The solutions frame often used in editorial/opinion writings of news media is suggestive of positive action. However, the findings point out that the frame only constitutes 40 (20.51%) articles of the total coverage across the sample, which compels the scope of more remedial measures in the articles. For the media accountability in a health emergency, the solutions frame is considered as a parameter and thus, calls for greater prominence by news media organizations. Further, it is noteworthy that the nature of experts in the three months' durations witnessed an acute gap of health professionals in writings. The finding agrees with the earlier works done by scholars in the aspect of low involvement of health professionals in delivering risk communication at times of public health emergencies. The analysis reveals how the frame of hope is given less credence comparatively, which involves post-pandemic explorations. Where media is largely accepted to enumerate attitudinal changes in public, such framing of the issue instills a negative discourse. Moreover, the frame is preceded by an appraisal frame across the three print mediums. Furthermore, the results portray how different newspapers express the pandemic in diverse forms. The coverage by the *Indian Express* observed visible writings by politicians who were comparatively deficient in the other two newspapers. The study substantiates the earlier work by scholars who suggested that ideological differences in newspapers are possibly the factor for framing and choosing sources for a news story regarding a pandemic where one newspaper might critique the government for greater responsibility, more than its counterparts. The findings

starkly evidence the huge proportion of journalists writing the majority of the articles. Such a result provides a significant inference of how journalists in times of uncertainty, as in a global outbreak, take the onus of being public health advocates, which is consistent with the works. For a comprehensive approach to the framing of media texts, a collaborative framework has been suggested by scholars, to which this study's results confirm. The media messaging by the news media, as per the research, has been affirmative. However, for an effective risk communication process, the gaps of health professionals and catalyzing remedial behavior need to be fulfilled with collective efforts from the media and the government with greater emphasis on public health emergencies, as the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

The onset of a public health crisis as the coronavirus pandemic poses greater risks and challenges than earlier for media coverage. While the present study analyzed the editorials/opinion pieces across three most read newspapers in the duration of three months, the coverage witnessed significant changes in the framing styles. With the recurring central theme of extensive articulation of the pandemic, issues induced due to the crisis and critiquing of government measures, in the Indian context, the traditional print medium remains a concrete tool in shaping public perceptions and driving policy discourse. Although the study on vernacular newspaper reporting in Karnataka surrounded the analysis of the connotations associated with the virus by scholars, there has been the absence of localized perspectives on the issue. This study provided the framing methods adopted by opinion writers in special articles in the news media where strong criticism of the state and center government measures is proclaimed while dispensing information on the pandemic. However, the presence of media frames majorly evidenced commentary on shortcomings of the media in handling the health emergency coverage that too, mostly by journalists. Further, the majority of writings by journalists carry a neutral tone, whereas most of the pieces by politicians are subjected to being against the government. The media could convey the material communication on the crisis and aligned issues with substantial criticism. However, it lacked in terms of suggesting measures to resolve the crisis and providing insights into corrective action for the present crisis and the future course of policy. Perhaps, the acute shortage of health officials consistently across the newspapers resulted in such a void. The framing of the issue, as per the analysis, has been diverse in the media. Such patterns, either similar or distinct, continue to emerge in a pandemic situation. The media coverage thus demands more scrutiny on the subject with a focus on localized reporting for a better understanding of public and policy discourse on subjects such as the pandemic, which are constantly evolving, presenting dynamic circumstances.

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