COVERING THE COVID-19: A VERBAL-VISUAL ANALYSIS OF LEADING NEWSPAPERS OF INDIA

Archana R Singh
Professor, School of Communication Studies,
Panjab University, Chandigarh.
Corresponding Author: Email: archanarsingh@gmail.com

Priyanka Ohri
Senior Research Fellow, School of Communication studies,
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Ishrat Singh
Senior Research Fellow, School of Communication Studies,
Panjab University, Chandigarh

ABSTRACT

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic (World Health Organisation, 2020). As the events unfolded around the world, media became the first responders of information with newspapers taking the responsibility to provide detailed analysis. Taking into consideration the importance of newspapers in times of a public health emergency, this paper analyses the verbal-visual coverage of COVID -19 in two leading newspapers of India, i.e. Dainik Bhaskar and The Times of India. The period chosen was February 15, 2020 to March 25, 2020, because it considers the gradual process of COVID-19 spreading its tentacles in India and the public health response by the government. With the intercoder reliability score at 86.6%, the analysis of the coverage has been conducted with the help of Barbara & Geoff Westwood's criteria for analysis of health-related content viz. design, content categorization, orientation, and tone of news stories. Visual analysis has been conducted with the help of Claire Harison's theory of visual semiotics. The editions chosen for the analysis are city (Chandigarh) editions, yet the sample did not contain an area or community-specific impact of coronavirus. Results show that in the initial days, COVID-19 had to compete with other ongoing events in the country to find a place of importance in the coverage. However, as days go by, coverage effectively highlights the issue while bridging the gap between the government and people with the main aim of supporting the government's narrative.

*Keywords***:** Covid-19, Coronavirus, Newspaper Coverage, Content Analysis, Pandemic Coverage

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers as a medium of mass communication are placed between the public and policy discourse. Acting as the bridge that educates one about the other, the print media can provide a window into the issues of public interest. The purpose of newspaper stories is not just to provide information but also to persuade the readers into action. Therefore, the newspapers are more than public notice boards; they are the forces of action.

Health coverage and campaign strategies can lead to policy formulations, actions on part of governments or health personnel, act as motivators and guides for the common man, and be further used to generate solutions. The way mass media is able to influence the significance of events in the minds of the public is the core point of emphasis in the agenda setting theory (McCombs&Shaw, 1972). Media is perceived as to not only can tell the masses 'what to think', but it is quite successful at telling them 'what to think about' (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). Despite social media promising interesting insights into detection of crises and rapid communication in an emergency, it is the national newspaper coverage that continues to be central to the framing of public and policy discourse on security and health emergencies (Dry&Leach, 2010). If health communication is done well, it can calm the frayed nerves besides saving lives but if not done well, it can lead to chaos. The objective of the study is to conduct a textual and visual analysis on the front pages

of the sample newspapers during the selected time frame. The main purpose is to identify the individual centric or structural centric approach of the news stories and the presence or absence of agenda or 'frame'. This study follows document analysis method in two stages viz. the verbal analysis of front page newspaper headlines about COVID-19 and the visual analysis of pictorial / illustrative content as well.

The codes for the analysis follow the criteria laid by Westwood & Westwood (1999a) for analysis of health related content. With changes suitable for the study at hand, four categories are identified, namely: Design, Content, Orientation and Tone. Further sub categorization is done within the above-mentioned broad categories.

Since the theoretical dimension stresses on the convergence of agenda setting and framing (Littlejohn, 2011), the visual content is being analysed for visual framing with the help of Claire Harison's theory of visual semiotics (Harison, 2003). This study uses headline size, design and placement as a criterion for framing. Pictures are categorised as symbolic, intimate and action/reaction.

Methods

This study explores the coverage of the COVID-19 on the front pages of two highest circulating Indian newspapers through a purposive sampling method. The newspapers chosen are Dainik Bhaskar (Hindi), henceforth called DB and Times of India (English), henceforth called TOI. February 15th to March 25th 2020 is chosen as the time frame for this study on the basis of the outbreak of COVID-19, its spread, it being declared as an epidemic and pandemic and finally the Janata curfew (Public imposed curfew) in India.

Unit of analysis for textual content is the 'headline'. Headline is that part of the news story that elaborates on the salience of the news item. The size, position and the content of the news story can be discerned from the headline. As per the technique of news writing, the headline is the last part to be written and it emerges out of the lead of the story. Therefore, headlines capture the essence of the news story.

Unit of analysis for the visual content is the Representative Personality (either a person/object or a group with similar traits. Henceforth called as RP)

Choosing nth day for testing (n= 5), two researchers coded the verbal and visual content on the front-page news stories for both the sample papers. In the absence of a story/picture on the nth day, the coder chose the next day. Intercoder reliability score is 86.6% similarity based on Total agreement /total sample formula.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is well recognised that the media plays an enormously influential role in public responses to health issues. The mass media has an unparalleled reach as a communication mechanism and social media in the present scenario has evolved as a communication tool which not only facilitates information dissemination and consumption, but also generation (Gunther, 1998; Tsao et al., 2021). Public health professionals have always been sensitive to the persuasive power of mass media (Chapman, 2007; Martinson and Hindman, 2005). Most recently, three emergency medicine experts from the University of Pennsylvania advocated the use of online platforms to disseminate accurate information to the public (Berman, 2021).

Governments have evolved strategies for dealing with pandemics over a period. In the original policy document, published by the Government of India in 2009, Section 5 of the plan outlines the operational framework for response to a pandemic in which India is affected. The Government of India's pandemic plan lays out pharmaceutical, non-pharmaceutical and risk communication strategies. (National Centre for Disease Control, 2010). The document did not envisage the public reaction to the pandemic. In a recent response to Covid-19, The Government of India has shared a comprehensive section on their NCDC website including Reporting formats, standard operating procedures, advisories, laboratory resources, training materials, case definitions and IEC materials (National Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

The IEC materials include comics on Covid and travel advisories from China, Korea and Italy. The extensive local travel and fear

reactions of Indian public do not find mention. Citing the instances of people in India trying to flee isolation wards in government hospitals and hide travel history or dodge the mandatory home quarantine, Patralekha Chatterjee points towards stigmatisation as "fear-based messaging can make a person feel that he or she is responsible for his and her disease" (Chatterjee, 2020).

Public health reporting in the media has the challenge of both influencing the health practices and also countering unhealthy choices. Health communicators have conducted several studies whenever pandemics or epidemics have hit a large population. Studies have also been conducted to form new health promotion models, defining reporting etiquettes, designing and promotion of health communication protocols. Studies on media coverage about pandemics used varieties of methodologies such as content analysis to study text, interviews of media practitioners, and focus groups of different stakeholders and so on.

Through content analysis, researchers have found that public health is presented less prominently and less positively than medical model issues (Westwood and Westwood,1999 b), that the national newspapers reported more factual information, and less information about preventive measures (Kato et al., 2016), that news sources on health issues have been a neglected area on Health Communication (Lopes et al., 2012), that enhanced newsworthiness of localized threat is highlighted even during an emerging pandemic (Smith, 2007), and have suggested that a clear editorial policy on the coverage of the epidemic could guide in a sustained and effective method of coverage of the epidemic (Mogambi et al., 2013). Different newspapers use their front pages differently for instance, The New York Times featured more international and national news stories, depended more frequently on its own staff for both stories and images, and used smaller headlines on its front pages (Kim&Chung, 2017).

Researchers have crossed borders in trying to find a comparison amongst different countries and found that cultural differences dominate. Coverage of a specific issue, such as swine flu, may reveal more general aspects of the place

of journalism in society. As a confirmation of globalisation, there are similarities in the amount of media attention and the timing of the spread of the virus, but interpretations of journalists differ as per their country (Cornia et al., 2016). Scholars have promoted the culture-centred approach in health communication because health issues are culturally located and all communication should be 'contextually embedded and co-constructed through dialogue with the cultural participants' (Dutta, 2008).

Secondary data can yield deeper insight into the subject. Results of systematically reviewed prior content-analytic studies show that media attention is immense, that news content stressed threat over precautionary measures, while the pattern of coverage tonality remained nebulous due to conflicting findings (Klemm et al., 2016). Qualitative methodologies such as interviews and focussed groups work effectively for sensitive topics in public health (Leask et al., 2010; Henrich&Holmes, 2011).

Links between epidemic risk, xenophobic responses, and the global economy are visible in the present crisis (White, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic is, first and foremost, a health crisis; however, it is rapidly becoming an economic one too (Mckee & Stuckler, 2020). In previous health communication studies, the relationship between health and economy are clearly emphasised with citizens facing insecurity of employment, income, housing, and even food (McKee et al., 2017). Since news media mirrors public sentiment, economic concerns in the newspapers reflect the global economic concerns. Media are important in shaping our notion of the world beyond what we can experience directly- the world that is beyond the reach of experience (Lippman, 1922).

Several researchers have studied the front pages of newspapers in the context of content prioritisation. Health communication is an area which has always been found wanting with regard to coverage, perhaps its salience is yet not understood except when it takes disastrous proportions like an epidemic or a pandemic for instance, Ghana's The Daily Graphic was found to not give priority to reproductive health issues in its coverage on a regular basis (Laar, 2010). Yet, when

newspapers cover health news, they have been found to be effective agenda setters. In fact any mediated communication—in the context of journalism, advertising, public relations, and strategic communication—is an effective mechanism for detecting, responding to, preventing, and controlling global health concerns (Poushter, 2016).

Media does a lot to set the policy agenda and to influence the way an issue is understood by the policy makers, interest groups, and the public (Linsky, 1986). Newspapers are able to highlight current issues according to priority through design, makeup, story structure, subject, appropriate writing style, and tone. On the basis of the importance placed for each news item in the newspapers, the readers are able to discern similar importance and priority for specific news items. There are definite points of convergence between Agenda setting and Framing theory (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001).

Framing can be done with the following techniques: the use of metaphors, stories (narration), tradition, jargon, artifacts, contrast, and spin (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). Frames represent 'ideological positions' and 'social narratives' through which journalism 'creates meaning' (Durham, 1998).

One of the main indicators of framing is the 'tone' of the story. Structuring of ideas, and language used along with packaging leads to framing (positive, negative, or neutral). Newspapers may openly criticise, applaud or encourage individuals, policies, systems or plans, persuading the readers to make up their minds and take their decisions according to newspaper stories. A wide range of disciplines have conceptualised the notion of *framing*; seeing frames as cognitive schemata through which we perceive, organise, and communicate experiences or as conscious devices used strategically for casting 'events' in a certain light, defining 'the issues' that we ought to attend to, and prioritising some interventions and responses over other possible ones (Pieri, 2019). Framing is about the emphasis of certain aspects of an event and the suppression of other aspects; it can be performed in four clear functions: problem definition, causal analysis, expression of moral judgment, and promoting a remedy (Entman, 1993). Entman's definition of framing is

widely used in media analysis; 'to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text' (Halfpenny et al., 2009). In framing of messages, visual framing also forms a large part (D'Angelo&Kuypers, 2010).

An association between the framing of health messages in the media and the public's perception of risk and related behaviour is affirmed and it was recommended that governments need to actively incorporate the media into pandemic communication planning (Sandell et al., 2013). A better understanding of this paradox was explored through the time-dependent interplay among changing influenza epidemiology, media attention, pandemic control measures, risk perception and public health behavior (Reintjes et al., 2016). Journalists must constantly decide which facts to include or emphasize, whom to use as sources, and what is really "an issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Previous research has proven that an average reader perceives 80% of graphic elements and 75% of photographs in newspapers and notices 56% of headlines while being aware of just 25% of the newspaper text, of which only 13% is read in detail (Moses, 2000). Similarly, it has been proved that people do not read but scan newspapers and there exists a so- called entry or access point—a dominant element on the page as the place of initial perceptual approach (reader's attention), more precisely, the point at which scanning stops and readers "enter" the content more deeply (Garcia, 2004). Newspapers have to adhere to certain universal rules i.e., design principles and the Gestalt principle (Dosen & Brkljačić, 2018). Studies on newspaper design point to the interaction of form and content through the influence of visual format on the perception and interpretation of the content. Each element on the front page has its own relevance and changes in the presentation leads to changes in the way the content is observed, perceived, and understood. This results in a new, optimized order of noticing and viewing time, thereby also indirectly affecting the overall impression of the newspaper among readers.

Visual messages possess a certain form, structure, convention, and their own syntax

rules that are understood within a particular cultural context (Messaris & Moriarty, 2005). The elements of the visual field create an organized meaningful whole. The ambiguous elements are subconsciously perceived as symmetrical structures by contextuality and interdependence (Lidwell, 2006).

The movement of the reader's eye, the holding of the newspaper, and the language of the publication are some of the elements that decide the design of the front pages. Readers first notice the object on the right, as a result of turning the pages with the right hand as per the Western-style perceptual sequence from left to right and the Gestalt laws of optical weight (Holmqvist&Wartenberg, 2005). Similarly, there is a general dominance of the left over the right-hand side of the newspaper page with regard to the dwell time—61.3% vs. 38.6%. Images are the entry point for the newspaper page and text and images are processed separately (Holmberg, 2004).Front pages do not create gestalt with their verbal and visual content. Another important point to remember is that agenda setting happens over a period of time and not by one month of newspaper coverage (Erbring et al., 1980). Besides, the placement of photographs and the illustrations concentrate on isolated events and depend on many factors other than design principles such as timely availability, quality of picture and space constraints.

Studies from India are rare but focused clearly on the media responsibility aspect. Room for improvement was found in health-related articles, section of publication, and size of the health articles (Paul&Singh, 2016). Levels of vested economic interest and health care available, size of health care stakeholders are factors influencing how risks are portrayed in terms of dread, controllability, familiarity, and uncertainty (Bie et al., 2016). Newsworthiness of the outbreak was dependent on the three t's of tumult, tension and terror (Haneef & Nair, 2003). Incorporation of modern news values and essential news writing techniques, within the local cultural dynamics is also discussed (Sastry and Dutta, 2017). Health inequalities in India are visible in the difficulties faced by people in social distancing measures and evidence on the geographic distribution of access to resources that guides deployment of additional resources during a pandemic (Quinn & Kumar, 2011).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis is conducted on both the aspects following the objectives of the study. The 'framing' of the topic is studied in both verbal and visual analysis. The individual centric or structural centric approach of news items and the news values are determined by the verbal analysis.

The data shows that the stories related to Corona virus started to appear only from 16th and 17th February onwards in the sample papers. In fact, on 15th February, there was no story on coronavirus and till the 24th February the salience of the event was not apparent in the newspaper as there was no regularity in the stories. From 17th to 24th February, the stories were limited to one to three columns. Main theme of the stories during the month of February was the economic impact of the outbreak around the world and the government at the centre asking the states to be on alert as three imported cases had been detected. In the initial month of the outbreak of the Coronavirus, it is treated as an issue which does not directly affect India as number of cases is meagre, so major focus on the outbreak's effect on the economy and efforts of the government to evacuate Indians in various parts of the world and other notable impact like possibility of postponement of Olympics. Serious coverage begins from 29th February with stories of economic impact with consistent increase in the COVID-19 related coverage. TOI also started a column called virus watch, which provided relevant information briefs for stories.

In the early phase of the coverage, the location of stories was mostly below the fold except for in instances where India was directly involved (as on 23rd February, where the story described how the effect on economy could be crippling businesses, as these scramble for supply for production). Most headlines are kicker in nature with main headlines double deck. DB used black colour and bold font where it is appropriate to highlight the relevant information, however, it uses other colours like yellow and red in the headlines as the stories pick up in March. The dominant colour used by TOI is Black but it also uses other variations of black, like grey. Newspapers also play with red and yellow, for example: *Corantine (Red bold): Even Indians from EU, Turkey, UK barred entry (Black bold)*.TOI

also uses blue and orange, especially when the information brief is under the nameplate of the newspaper, for example: On 20th March, information below the nameplate states: *British actor Indira Verma tests positive (black font with light blue-grey background).* In yet another example: on 24th March, one of the information briefs under the name plate states that *Harvey Weinstein tested positive (white font with orange background).* With regard to usage of colour in headlines there are a variety of opinions. Traditionalists believe that headlines should be black only as today we can achieve colorful pages without colorizing headlines (Garcia, 2002). However, newspaper designers evidently think otherwise (Refer Table 1).

the limelight in Indian media relegating COVID-19 related stories into the background.

Visual analysis
The code to study the visual elements primarily identified a Representative Personality (RP) and analysed how it was presented along with the other design elements. Having identified whether the photograph is action, reaction or symbolic, the RP's eyeline, vertical and horizontal level, and distance from the viewer is identified. This pointed towards the message intended for the viewer. In addition, elements like size, focus, angle, perspective, and contrast are studied.

Table 1: Headline types

S.No	Item	Dainik Bhaskar				Times of India			
		Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total
1	No. of stories	6	13	29	48	10	34	85	129
2`	No of photos	1	19	43	63	2	15	35	53
3	Headlines								
3.1	Multi deck	0	0	2	2	8	14	23	45
3.2	Double deck	0	1	9	10	2	16	34	52
3.3	Kicker	4	10	11	25		1		1
3.4	Crossline			1	1				
3.5	Hammerhead	0	2	0	2		1	1	2
3.6	Inverted	0	0	0	0		1	3	4
3.7	Banner	0	0	3	3		1	3	4

As the stories get bigger, both in size and in importance, they mix the placement of stories above and below the fold. As the seriousness of the issue grows, the newspapers cover full pages, with colourful illustrations and other design elements, for example on 25th March, the coverage on the front page deals with specific advisory issued by the newspapers for the measures they should be following to protect themselves. It is interesting to note that between 25th February to 3rd March, Dainik Bhaskar does not carry any story on coronavirus, and between 25th February to 28th February, there is no coverage in The Times of India either. This is the period when violent protests broke out in Delhi against the Citizen Amendment Act and President of the United States of America, Donald Trump was also visiting India. These two major stories hogged

The visual content in both the papers consisted of photographs and infographics, although TOI coverage uses graphs/tables/infographics much more than DB. Tables using graphics with various colours and Geometric shapes increase contrast and attention. Stories with stress on economic, medical aspect and supplies of essential items are explained with infographics, for example: a headline in TOI on 19th February states, "Centre plans duty cuts, other steps to soften virus impact" and 29th February coverage deals with "Coronage: Sensex suffers 2nd biggest one day loss ever". In this story, the infographic is accompanied with words like "*CORONAGE*". The word and infographic highlight the magnitude of impact of the virus on the economy. In addition, the colour used is red and the subhead of the

infographic uses the word VIRUS-HIT in bold red. A table with multiple colours to highlight statistics adds contrast to the page and attracts viewers. The 1st March coverage states, "India starts hunt for alternatives for China to source over 1K items": this story utilizes a table to highlight the items for which India needs supply and which countries are the best alternatives except for China.

DB coverage: Total number of stories in DB is 48 whereas the number of visuals is 63. This data itself highlights the importance given to visuals. Of all the visuals, 33 pictures are symbolic in nature which means that they are used to emphasize the point and situation. The intimate images are 18 in number. These are the images that follow the eyeline of the RP as he is not looking at the viewer. Intimacy is utilized to engage the readers and involve the readers in the situation, for example: in one of the stories of 19th March; '276 Indians in foreign countries test positive, of which 255 in Iran; only 169 in the country' (translated from Hindi). Further, the story also states how the country is ready to fight the pandemic. The picture shows a man holding a placard and it is an intimate, symbolic picture and represents a demand. It has been clicked from a medium angle and from the RP's eye level.

Picture 1: Intimate, symbolic picture

Sardarji Holding a Placard - Caption: "*Ek doctor ki guzarish... mai aapke liye kaam par data hun, aap hamare liye ghar par rahen.*"

Source: Dainik Bhaskar, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 19th March, 2020. (photographer unknown).

Majority of the pictures used subjects that might not be directly related to the stories but effectively highlight the escalating magnitude of the economic and medical situation in India. The number of action and reaction pictures is only 16 though such pictures provide a real sense of action to ongoing stories. For example: the picture from a story on 9th March is clicked from the eyeline of a man going through a document held by a woman; his arm pointing at something in the document lends a sense of importance to the document and urgency in action. Use of such pictures often enhances the appeal of the verbal message.

Picture 2: Action picture

Father-Daughter Picture

Source: Dainik Bhaskar, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 9th March, 2020 (Photographer Unknown)

The use of angle in photographs is observed to have a desired impact, especially those clicked from a lower angle. In the coverage of COVID-19, the role, importance and dedication of certain people has been highlighted in many stories. Photographs accompanying them, clicked from a lower angle show them as strong and big. For example, the photograph accompanying a news story on 14th March, is not intimate to the viewer but to the other subjects in the photo.

Picture 3: Authoritative figures wearing masks

Pujaris Performing Rituals. Caption: *"Ehtiyat: Mandir se Maidaan Tak Mask..."*

Source: Dainink Bhaskar, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 14th March, 2020. (Photographer unknown)

The RP are two priests in a temple who are wearing masks, photographed from a lower angle, they are shown as powerful men who lead the public and set an example by wearing masks. (Refer Table 2).

TOI coverage: One of the striking characteristics of TOI coverage is that pictures and infographics are used as a supplementary material and not something which must be a part of the coverage. For instance, 25th March has a full front page coverage on COVID-19; however, the number of pictures used is just two. One is a table highlighting the cases in different states, and the other is a picture of the prime minister of India. This shows that the focus is on the relevant content which is effectively highlighted with the help of bold black or red fonts and usage of other colours.

As the days progress, TOI starts to use the space below the nameplate (effective use of space with text and a small picture) so that readers are enticed into reading the subsequent coverage. For example, on 18th March, one of the information briefs below the nameplate states how President Trump's tweet against China fuels the fire. Here the image is of Donald Trump in action.

Picture 4: Use of intimate and action oriented picture in Masthead

Trump - Caption: *"Trump's 'Chinese Virus' Tweet Adds Fuel to Fire with Beijing"*

Source: Times of India, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 18th March, 2020. (Photographer Unknown)

This picture is used in combination of white font and orange colour as a background of the

Table 2: Use of visuals in Dainik Bhaskar

	Dainik Bhaskar				
S.No	Item	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total
1	No. of stories	6	13	29	48
2	No of photos	1	19	43	63
2.1	Tables/infographic	0	4	9	
2.2	Pictures	1	10	32	
2.3	Pictures with tables	0	5	2	
2.4	Intimate	1	4	13	
2.5	symbolic	1	9	23	
2.6	Action/Reaction		8	8	

text. The intimate and action oriented picture highlights the relevance of the information for international relations, as India trades not only with the USA, but also with China. This coverage also carries a perceptive story on the opposite of the front page.

21st and 22nd March carry an advisory by the newspaper on the front page. In both cases, the advertisement jacket has been analysed as a front page because the advisories on the jacket are directly relevant to the COVID-19 coverage. For example, the advisory on the 21st March edition addresses the issue of fake news during the pandemic, the picture used is not intimate. A man wears a mask and looks towards the text of the advisory. It highlights how one should also protect herself/himself against the fake news and not just the virus, as the mask carries on itself, a text. It promoted print media by saying ,`Print is proof'.

Picture 5: Full page advisory on Jacket

Advisory with Masked Man - Caption: *"Covid-19 has shown us that fake news is a real issue".*

Source: Times of India, Chandigarh Edition, Newspaper Jacket, 21st March, 2020. (Photographer Unknown)

The pictures used in the coverage are an effective mix of intimate and symbolic, taking into consideration that the current situation is unprecedented and not only affects the daily lives of people and economy of the country, it also impacts the way journalists stand on the frontlines to bring information to the readers, in many cases it seemed impossible to get a picture directly related to the story. Hence, some symbolic pictures are used such as one on 5th March states: 'Another city resident among 23 who test positive' uses a box with multiple colours. It also comprises a caricature of a woman wearing a mask.

Picture 6: Symbolic

Lady as a Caricature- Caption: *"India to Screen all Incoming Passengers on International Flights"*

Source: Times of India, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 5th March, 2020 (Photographer Unknown)

This picture is symbolic, highlighting the need to use protective gear to protect yourself. Further, the 12th March coverage deals with India quarantining itself from the rest of the world. The story explains how WHO has declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic. So, to highlight the global impact of the outbreak, the picture, which is part of the table, has an aircraft with people dressed in protective equipment with their backs towards the readers.

This picture is in action, and not intimate, but it highlights a distance between the pandemic and the people of India. Since, India had by now taken several measures to isolate itself from the rest of the world, the picture is a fit.

Picture 7: Action oriented but not intimate
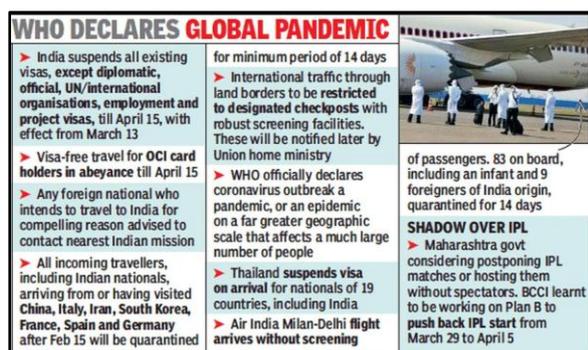
People Wearing PPE Kits Near an Aircraft -Caption: "WHO Declares Global Pandemic"

Source: Times of India, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 12th March, 2020. (Photographer Unknown)

As important are the symbolic pictures to add more value to the coverage, so are the intimate pictures to engage the reader in the intensity of the ever-evolving situation. For instance, 14th March coverage states that a 68-year-old woman is Delhi's first novel coronavirus casualty. Here the picture is part of the box, highlighting the measures by states across the country.

Picture 8: Intimate and representative
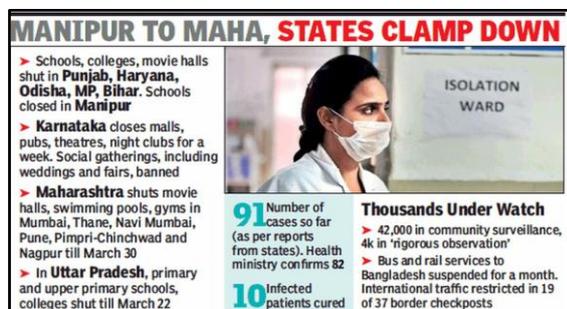
Lady Health Worker in Mask - Caption: "Manipur to Maha, States Clamp Down"

Source: Times of India, Chandigarh Edition, Pg 1, 14th March, 2020. (Photographer Unknown)

Here, RP has been clicked from an intimate distance but is looking away. The 13th March coverage states, 'As virus ravages global markets & triggers widespread panic, more countries and cities go into virtual lockdown', and 'World was C: Sensex crashes 2919 pts, by far its worst ever'. This coverage uses a comprehensive infographic with colours like light blue, black and red. It is also complemented with a perceptive coverage about the lessons pertaining to dealing with the virus from countries like South Korea on the opposite of the front page (Refer Table 3).

As we analyse the front pages, we need to be aware that any agenda setting or framing analysis can never be understood in absolute terms because other factors such as personal, political, societal, economic conditions in the real world will limit the newspaper reading experience, degree of perception, and influence across the population. What goes into the front pages is determined by various factors, resources being one of them.

Research has shown that traditional images and close-up shots of individuals should be avoided to frame 'positively'. The RPs in the study are mostly not looking directly at the readers to establish intimate contact. This leads the readers towards the problem and does not assign it to an individual.

Unlike bullet theory, framing does not expect impact to happen in a blanket sweep across populations. Despite the above-mentioned constraints, the front pages do tell the readers what to think about.

Verbal analysis:
This section includes the verbal analysis through the study of design, content

Table 3: Use of visuals in Times of India

Sr. No	Item	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total
		Times of India			
1.	No. of stories	10	34	85	129
2.	No of photos	2	15	38	55
2.1	Tables	2	10	10	
2.1	Pictures		1	21	
2.3	Tables & pictures with tables	2	10 +4	10+7	
2.4	Intimate	-	1	18	
2.5	symbolic		5	21	
2.6	Action/Reaction			8	

categorisation, orientation and tone of the stories.

Design is identified by location on page, headline and text size, headline type, and text colour. Content has been categorised under policy, politics, sociologically based grouping of content components i.e. gender/ age/ ethnicity/ socio-economic, geographic, life-style and community oriented issues, treatment, or more institutionally based aspects of content. Orientation of reporting is based on author /by line, comments or quotes by opinion makers, whether the item is primarily about issues or people, nature of reporting is about the genres of news stories, feature article or editorial and, types of news writing styles identifies the story as either event oriented or perceptive which gives away the organisational agenda. Lastly, the tone of reporting is studied on the basis of positive or negative or neutral. The tone of the reporting and the sources used are direct indicators of framing.

Since the analysis was of the front pages only, the maximum numbers of stories are written in news writing style. DB has included some articles, features, and appeals besides news. The anchor space has not been fruitfully utilised despite the stories being placed at the bottom of the fold. Most news stories in this sample feature salient aspects of an event, as they evolved. While doing so, the overarching patterns or risk factors for particular events got ignored. Since newspaper reporting happens day after day over a period of time, the framing is logically more towards being episodic rather than thematic. Tone is a rhetorical communication and is a characteristic of much political and media discourse. This study has found the 'tone' of the stories to be positive as they are non-threatening, non-argumentative and in agreement with authority (Refer Table 4).

Table 4: Nature, Type and Tone of the stories

		Dainik Bhaskar				Times of India			
S.No		Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total
1	No. of stories	6	13	29	48	10	34	85	129
2	No of photos	1	19	43	63	2	15	35	53
3	Nature								
	News	5	11	21	37	10	34	84	128
	Article/feature	1	2	5	8				
	Human interest	0	0	0	0			1	1
	Appeal			3	3				
	Total	6			48				129
4	Type								
	Event	2	10	11	23	10	28	66	104
	Perceptive	4	1	13	18		2	5	7
	Both	0	2	5	7		4	14	18
	Total				48				129
5	Tone								
	Positive	3	7	18	28	5	21	36	62
	Negative	3	3	9	15	5	9	36	50
	Both	0	3	2	5		4	13	17
	Total	6			48				129

The study found that the initial phase of coverage deals with policy aspects where Indian government is not only taking various steps to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus outbreak on the economy but also making efforts to evacuate Indians from various parts of the world. Majority of the TOI coverage focuses on highlighting policy measures of the central and state governments. The decisions to curb trade with China find space in early coverage. The coverage does not paint India in any bad light thereby, bridging the gap and building trust in the minds of people which is essential in policy compliance by people to combat any unprecedented situations like COVID-19. Coverage specifically highlights measures being taken in Haryana, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh. It was found that social distancing is being mentioned but not stressed enough or explained with clarity.

Table 5: Sources

S.No		Dainik Bhaskar				Times of India			
		Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total
1	No. of stories	6	13	29	48	10	34	85	129
2	No of photos	1	19	43	63	2	15	35	53
3	Sources								
3.1	Official	3	9	22	34	10	28	62	100
3.2	Medical/Hospital/Doctor/WHO	1	1	3	5		5	13	18
3.3	Research	0	1	0	1		2	1	3
3.4	Eye witness	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	4
3.5	Airline	0	0	0	0		1	1	2
3.6	School Mgmt	0	0	0	0		1		1
3.7	Private Com	0	0	0	0		1		1
3.8	Social media/news net/newspaper	1	1	6	8		1	18	19
3.9	Market trends	0	2	1	3		3	5	8
3.11	Celebrities	0	0	1	1			2	2
3.12	Trade Organization/others	1	0	1	2				
3.13	Sportspersons	0	1	1	2				

Major policy decisions highlighted during this period are:
1. Helpline started
2. Punjab put on alert
3. People leaving for Kartarpur corridor being checked and masks distributed
4. Holidays suspended in health department Punjab as health emergency is declared in the department
5. Centre advises people to avoid travelling until 31st March and maintain distance of one metre among each other
6. RBI advises digital payments instead of cash
7. All heritage monuments and museums closed
8. India's four borders sealed and army's help roped in to keep the suspect patients in isolation
9. In Delhi, people more than 50 are not allowed to assemble
10. India bans passengers from EU, turkey and England

Workforce/industrial/educational/legal/ethical: The coverage has taken into account the ethical responsibility of the Indian government to help Indians stuck in various parts of the world due to the coronavirus. Most of the coverage is educational in nature, concentrating on creating awareness. Coverage also takes into account the ethical responsibilities of Indian system in combating the pandemic, so that people are apprised about the government's care for its people.

Major workforce related issues that form the important part of coverage are:

1. Primary schools in Delhi closed
2. People across country kept under observation
3. Advisory issued to businessmen in Himachal
4. Biometric attendance suspended in Punjab

Gender/age/ethnicity/socio-economic, geographic: Majority stories cater to a cross section of readership as they concentrate chiefly on awareness generation about the ever-evolving situation across the country. Stories related to economic impact of the outbreak target businessmen, traders, and special readers such as medical personnel such as the 23rd March headline that states, 'No indiscriminate testing, breaking chain is key: govt'. Coverage does try to target various sections where appropriate, such as school going readers, their parents and school staff where they highlight shutting down of schools. Coverage does highlight which workforce is being affected by the decisions/news that has been mentioned in the newspaper.

Medical/treatment/rehabilitation: Out of the entire sample this category has been

	Dainik Bhaskar				Times of India			
Item	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total	Feb 15 to 29	March 1 to 15	March 16-25	Total
Orientation								
People	2	2	2	6	2	7	12	21
Issue	3	5	13	21	8	23	55	86
Both	1	6	14	21		4	18	22
Total	6			48				129

highlighted 22 times. Yet, on 21st February, when a suspected COVID-19 patient eloped from the hospital in Gurdaspur, on seeing masked doctors, the coverage stated that hospitals are making an effort to follow protocol which has been established by international standards. Similarly, the story titled, 'LIC clarifies that Coronavirus related treatment will be covered under its policies', directly educates about medical insurance. Most encouraging stories are from this category such as the story of a survivor from Kerala; India has 1 lakh testing kits 20 lakh more have been ordered; to ensure that there is no community transmission random sampling tests have been done; 43000 isolation beds; WHO states that India has the capacity to fight the virus.

Facilities/technology/research: Out of the entire sample this category has only been highlighted 13 times in TOI and 9 days in DB. There is stress on medical /treatment and rehabilitation and only 6 stories highlight the facilities.

Approach and orientation of reporting: The coverage has been found to follow structural centric approach rather than individual centric for news items. TOI uses a mixture of Times news network stories and by line stories by their journalists/correspondents. In the entire sample, 37 person specific by lines are found in TOI whereas DB does not have a single by line story. Maximum sources used for the stories are government or official sources (cited 103 times by TOI and 29 times by DB) and most news stories are event oriented (112). Both the papers have managed to keep their coverage issue oriented with a positive tone.

It is understood that news originates from decisions made in the newsroom rather than by events from the outside yet policy decisions and statements by government officials act as a trigger for newsroom discussion and decision making. The press in this case is not negative and optimism emerges as a prominent theme. In the selected sample, the most common form of narrative frame is the straight news account of the inverted pyramid outlining the basic who, what, when where, why and how. The other frames prominently used are consensus and conjecture, where discussions concentrate on education regarding prevention, facilities, treatment etc. Policy exploring or backgrounding is not common as the stories concentrated on the present scenario rather than conducting any comparative analysis. Policy decisions are accepted at the face value and reality checks are rarely conducted (Refer Table 5).

Although it is commonly understood that newspapers interpret or explain the topics, the front pages found this aspect to be underused. The stories are issue oriented rather than people oriented. Since the newspapers are found developing stories triggered by government action around the health crisis, they have missed an opportunity to place the issue in a larger perspective by explaining the broader implications of policy decisions and how these decisions will fit into other moments of history (Refer Table 6).

CONCLUSION
In the above analysis, it was observed that government agenda has been promoted through both the story headlines and the use of pictures. As government agenda evolved from policy decisions, economic impact to medical, educational, and safety decisions were being taken and advisories given to the readers. The aspect of prioritisation is visible as the best source of information for the newspapers was the government and is used in almost all the stories. Absence of by line stories indicates the use of agencies and source

press releases for the stories and also the reliance on established sources.

This study points towards defining the problem by educating through large stories on front pages. Causal analysis has not been conducted as the newspapers have been dealing with everyday coverage of the spread of the virus while movement of the reporters themselves is curtailed. Only the detailed, perceptive stories were accompanied by infographics, graphs and pictures.

Event oriented stories are more in number because the story is constantly evolving. The stories have the 'bad' news value more than 'good', but the tone of the stories is found to be positive. In all the aspects of this study, the frames have been to promote the policy agenda through media agenda to turn into a public agenda. These tie in with a functionalist approach to news values in which 'news selection is not understood as a direct response to certain stimuli but as an intentional act to reach certain ends' (Staab, 1990).

Overall, this study points towards the day-to-day decision making by the newspapers in the absence of a set contingency plan. Devoting full front pages to advisories issued by the government, using government sources for stories, writing multi deck headlines, placing above the fold lead stories, creating new columns for data sharing, using scare heads in colour, are all the measures taken by the newspapers. The front pages of the two newspapers maintained a positive tone and the sheer volume of news that was guiding the readers towards behaviour change emphasised the seriousness of the issue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABC. (2018). *Highest circulated daily newspapers (language wise).* Retrieved March 20, 2020, from Audit Bureau of Circulations: http://www.auditbureau.org/files/JD2018%20Highest%20Circulated%20(language%20wise).pdf

Agency. (2020, March 9). Coronavirus: Tamilnadu main 1 mariz sankramit paya gya tha, Delhi main 337 log isolation main rakhe (verbatim from Hindi). *Dainik Bhaskar: Chandigarh Edition*, pp. 1.

Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (1998). A theory of media power and a theory of media use: Different stories, questions, and ways of thinking. *Mass Communication and Society, 1*(1-2), 5-40.

Bhaskar News. (2020, March 19). Videsh Main 276 Indian COVID se infected, enme se 255 sirf Iran main (verbatim from Hindi). *Dainik Bhaskar: Chandigarh Edition,* pp. 1.

Bhaskar News. (2020, March 14). Corona se desh main dusri maut: Delhi main 69 saal ki mahila ne dum toda (verbatim from Hindi). *Dainik Bhaskar: Chandigarh Edition,* pp. 1.

Bie, B., Tang, L., &Treise, D.M. (2016). Be aware of superbugs: Newspaper coverage of NDM-1 in India, UK, and the USA .*Asian Journal of Communication, 26*(1), 58-75.

Berman, R. (2021, January 12). Embracing social media for public health messaging. *Medical News Today: Healthline Media.* https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/embracing-social-media-for-public-health-messaging

Cornia, A., Ghersetti, M., Mancini, P., & Oden, T.(2016). The partisans, the technocrats and the watchdogs: Domestication in the media coverage of the swine flu pandemic 2009. *Journalism Studies, 17*(8), 1030-1050.

Chapman, S. (2007). The News on Smoking. In: *Public Health Advocacy and Tobacco Control: Making Smoking History*(pp.62-67). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Chatterje, P. (2020). Gaps in India's preparedness for COVID-19 control. *The Lancet: Infectious Diseases, 20*(5), 544.

D'Angelo, P., &Kuypers, J.A. (2010). *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives.* New York: Routledge.

Dey, S. (2020, March 12). All visas to country with few exceptions suspended till April 15. *The Times of India: Chandigarh Edition*, pp. 1.

Dosen, D.O., &Brkljačić, L. (2018). Key design elements of daily newspapers: Impact on the reader's perception and visual impression. *KOME − An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry.*

Dry, S., &Leach, M. (2010).*Epidemics: Science, Governance and Social Justice.* London: Routledge.

Durham, F.D. (1998). News frames as social narratives: TWA flight 800. *Journal of Communication, 48*(4), 100-117.

Dutta, M.J. (2008). *Communicating Health: A Culture-centred Approach.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Entman, R.M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51-58.

Erbring, L., Goldenberg, E.N., &Miller, A.H. (1980). Front-page news and real-world cues: A new look at agenda-setting by the media. *American Journal of Political Science, 24*(1), 16-49.

Fairhurst, G.T., &Sarr, R.A. (1996). *The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Gamson, W.A., &Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology, 95*(1), 1-37.

Garcia, M. (2002). Headlines in Color. In: Poynter. Available at: https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2002/headlines-in-color/.

Garcia, M.R. (2004). Rethink, not redesign. New designs, new formats. *World Association of Newspapers, 3*(3), 30-32.

Gunther, A.C. (1998). The persuasive press influence: Effects of mass media on perceived public opinion. *Communication Research, 25*(5), 486-504.

Halfpenny, P., Lin, Y., &Pieri, E. (2009). *Using text mining for frame analysis of media content.* Manchester : Report, JISC E-Infrastructure Programme. Retrieved from: https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/using-text-mining-for-frame-analysis-of-media-content-jisc-einfrastructure-programme-jisc-final-report(3a9a40c5-a176-45bd-bdb7-b4f46659339b).html

Haneef, M.S.M., &Nair, P.P. (2003). SARS: Powder keg or a pinch of salt: Coverage of the pandemic in Indian English dailies. *Media* Asia, 30(4), 228-239.

Harrison, C. (2003). Visual semiotics: Understanding how still images make meaning. *Technical Communication, 50*(1), 46-60.

Henrich, N., &Holmes, B. (2011). Communicating during a pandemic: Information the public wants about the disease and new vaccines and drugs. *Health Promotion Practice, 12*(4), 610-619.

Holmberg, N. (2004). *Eye movement patterns and newspaper design factors: An experimental approach.*(Master's Thesis, Lund University, Sweden). Retrieved from: https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/1328870

Holmqvist, K., &Wartenberg, C. (2005). The role of local design factors for newspaper behaviour: An eye-tracking perspective. *Lund University Cognitive Studies, 127,* 1-21.

Jha, D.N. (2020, March 5). Another city resident among 23 who test positive. *The Times of India: Chandigarh Edition*, pp. 1.

Jha, D.N. (2020, March 14). 68 year old woman Delhi's first corona casualty. *The Times of India: Chandigarh Edition,* pp. 1.

Kato, M., Ishikawa, H., &Kiuchi, T. (2016). Media coverage of a global pandemic in Japan: Content analysis of A/ H1N1 influenza newspaper articles. *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism, 6*(1), 1-5.

Kim, Y.S. &Chung, D.S. (2017). Anatomy of front pages: Comparison between The New York Times and other U.S. major metropolitan newspapers. *International Journal of Communication, 11,* 949-966.

Klemm, C., Das, E., &Hartmann, T. (2016). Swine flu and hype: a systematic review of media dramatization of the H1N1 influenza pandemic. *Journal of Risk Research, 19*(1), 1-20.

Laar, A.K. (2010). Family planning, abortion, and HIV in Ghanaian print media: A 15-month content analysis of a national Ghanaian newspaper. *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de la Santé Reproductive, 14*(4), 80-86.

Leask, J., Hooker, C., &King, C. (2010). Media coverage of health issues and how to work more effectively with journalists: A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health.*

Linsky, M. (1986). *Impact: How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking.* New York: Norton.

Lippman, W. (1922). *Public Opinion.* New York: Macmillan.

Littlejohn, S. (2011). *Theories of Human Communication.* Belmont: Wadsworth Publication.

Lopes, F., Ruao, T., Mrinho, S., & Araujo, R. (2012). A media pandemic: Influenza A in Portuguese newspapers. *International Journal of Healthcare Management, 5*(1), 19-27.

Martinson, B.E., &Hindman, D.B. (2005). Building a health promotion agenda in local newspapers. *Health Education Research, 20*(1), 51-60.

McCombs, M.E., &Shaw, D.L. (1972). The agenda setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176-187.

McCombs, M., &Ghanem, S.I. (2001). The Convergence of Agenda Setting and Framing. In Reese, S.D., Gandy, O.H. Jr., &Grant, A.E. (Ed.). *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*(pp. 67-81). New York: Routledge.

Mckee, M., &Stuckler, D. (2020). If the world fails to protect the economy, COVID-19 will damage health not just now but also in the future. *Nature Medicine, 26*(5), 640-642.

McKee, M., Reeves, A., Clair, A., &Stuckler, D. (2017). Living on the edge: Precariousness and why it matters for health. *Archives of Public Health, 75*(13), 1-10

Messaris, P, &Moriarty, S. (2005). Visual Literacy Theory. In Smith, K., Moriarty S., Barbatsis, G., &Kenny, K. (Ed.) *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory Methods and Media*(pp. 481-502). New Jersey: LEA.

Mogambi, H., Kiai, W., &Ndati, N. (2013). Priming HIV messages in Kenyan print media: Patterns, trends, and Issues. *Sage Open*, 1-13.

Moses, M. (2000). Consumer mentality. *The American Editor [online], 808*(4), 6-7.

National Centre of Disease Control. (2020). *COVID19.* Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Retrieved from https://ncdc.gov.in/index4.php?lang=1& level=0&linkid=132&lid=549

National Centre for Disease Control. (2010). *Draft Pandemic Preparedness and Response for Managing Novel Influenza A H1N1. (earlier called Swine flu).*Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

Paul, S., &Singh, A.B. (2016). Coverage of health-related articles in major local newspapers of Manipur. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion, 5*(3).

Pieri, E. (2019). Media framing and the threat of global pandemics: The Ebola crisis in UK media and policy response. *Sociological Research Online, 24*(1), 73-92.

Poushter, J. (2016). Smartphone ownership and Internet usage continues to climb in emerging economies. Pew Research Centre. Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/20 16/02/22/smartphone-ownership-and-internet-usage-continues-to-climb-in-emerging-economies/

Quinn, S.C., &Kumar, S. (2011). Existing health inequalities in India: Informing preparedness planning for an influenza pandemic. *Health policy and planning: The Journal of Health Policy and Systems research, 27*(6), 516–526.

Reintjes, R., Das, E., Klemm, C., Richardus, J.H., Keßler, V., &Ahmad, A. (2016). Pandemic public health paradox: Time series analysis of the 2009/10 Influenza A / H1N1 epidemiology, media attention, risk perception and public reactions in 5 European countries. *PLoSONE, 11*(3), e0151258.

Sandell, T., Sebar, B., &Harris, N. (2013). Framing risk: Communication messages in the Australian and Swedish print media surrounding the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 41*(8), 860-865.

Sastry, S., &Dutta, M.J. (2017). Health communication in the time of Ebola: A culture-centred interrogation. *Journal of Health Communication, 22*(1), 10-14.

Smith, J.A. (2007). Hermeneutics, human sciences and health: Linking theory and practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 2*(1), 3-11.

Staab, J.F. (1990). The role of news factors in news selection: A theoretical reconsideration. *European Journal of Communication, 5*(4), 423–443.

Tsao, S-F., Chen, H., Tisseverasinghe, T., Yang, Y., Li, L. & Butt, Z.A. (2021). What social media told us in the time of COVID-19: A scoping review. *The Lancet, 3*(3), E175-E194. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2589-7500(20)30315-0

The Times of India. (2020, March 18). Trump's 'Chinese virus' tweet adds fuel to fire with Beijing. *The Times of India: Chandigarh Edition*, pp. 1.

The Times of India. (2020, March 21). COVID-19 has shown us that fake news is a real issue. *The Times of India: Chandigarh Edition*, pp. Newspaper Jacket.

Westwood, B, &Westwood, G. (1999 a) Assessment of newspaper reporting of public health and the medical model: a methodological case study. *Health Promotion International, 14*(1), 53-64.

Westwood, B., &Westwood, G. (1999 b). Assessment of newspaper reporting of public health and the medical model: a methodological case study. *Health Promotion International, 14*(1), 53-64.

White, A.I. (2020). The art of medicine: Historical linkages: epidemic threat, economic risk, and xenophobia. *Lancet, 395*(10232), 1250-1251.

W. H. (2006). Univerzalnanačeladizajna. *Zagreb: Mate* .

Gumbrecht, J., & Howard, J. (2020, March 12). WHO declares novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. CNN Health. Retrieved from: https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/11/health/coronavirus-pandemic-world-health-organization/index.html

***