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The Role Of Social Media In Improving Hygiene Practices Among General Public During COVID-19

Abul Hassan
School of Creative Arts
The University of Lahore

Tanveer Hussain
&
Abdul Basit
School of Media and Communication Studies
University of Management and Technology

Abstract

Social media has been a vibrant source of education for the masses during Covid-19. These virtual platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok and WhatsApp, educated the general public of Pakistan with abundance of information regarding hygienic and healthy lifestyle. With the help of social media, people sorted to exercise at home, healthy dieting, proper medication and sanitizing from germs during the lockdown in pandemic situation which they were not consistently practiced previously. This research intends to explore general public's dependency on social media for hygiene, and its impact on their lives during their lockdown. This quantitative research consists of survey method with a convenient sample of 200 residents of Lahore consisting of 4 different age brackets. The data predicts that people with high age took social media messages of exercise, diet, medication and sanitization more seriously and applied precautions aptly while respondents with low age bracket were less worried about diet but more concern about body exercises and sanitizing. Respondents from almost all the age brackets indicated towards their learning about medical understanding of a disease and its treatment. The study found out that people with less interaction with social media relied more on it with strong impact. It also indicates that social media has made people more conscious about healthy exercises, nutritious diet and authentic medication for disease free life. People got training to fight a global pandemic by utilizing social media adequately.

Keywords: Social Media, Hygiene Practices, Covid-19.

تلخیص

کووڈ -۱۹ کے دوران سوشل میڈیا عوام کے لئے تعلیم کا ایک متحرک ذریعہ رہا ہے۔ فیس بک ، ٹویٹر ، یوٹیوب ، ٹک ٹوک اور واٹس ایپ سمیت ان ورچوئل پلیٹ فارمز نے پاکستان کے عام عوام کو حفظان صحت اور صحت مند طرز زندگی سے متعلق بھر پور معلومات سے آگاہ کیا۔ سوشل میڈیا کی مدد سے ، لوگوں نے وبائی حالت میں لاک ڈاؤن کے دوران گھر پر ورزش ، صحت مند غذا، مناسب دوائیاں اور جراثیم سے نجات پانے کے لئے ترتیب دیا جس پر وہ پہلے مستقل مزاجی سے عمل نہیں کرتے تھے۔ اس تحقیق کا مقصد عام لوگوں کی حفظان صحت کے لئے سوشل میڈیا پر انحصار ، اور ان کے

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لاک ڈاؤن کے دوران ان کی زندگی پر پڑنے والے اثرات کو تلاش کرنا ہے۔یہ مقداری تحقیق سروے کے طریقہ کار پر مشتمل ہے جس میں لاہور کے ۲۰۰ رہائشیوں کے ۴ مختلف عمر پر مشتمل ایک آسان نمونہ ہے۔ اعداد و شمار کی پیش گوئی ہے کہ زیادہ عمر والے افراد نے ورزش ، غذا، دوائی اور صفائی ستھرائی کے سوشل میڈیا پیغامات کو زیادہ سنجیدگی سے لیا اور احتیاطی تدابیر کا بخوبی استعمال کیا جبکہ کم عمر کے حامل افراد غذا کے بارے میں کم پریشان تھے لیکن جسمانی ورزشوں اور صفائی کے بارے میں زیادہ تشویش رکھتے تھے۔ تقریباً تمام عمر کے جواب دہندگان نے بیماری اور اس کے علاج سے متعلق سمجھنے کے بارے میں ان کی تعلیم کی طرف اشارہ کیا۔اس تحقیق میں پتا چلا ہے کہ سوشل میڈیا کے ساتھ کم تعامل رکھنے والے افراد نے اس پر زیادہ اثر ڈالا ہے۔ اس سے یہ بھی اشارہ ملتا ہے کہ سوشل میڈیا نے لوگوں کو صحت مند مشقوں ، متناسب غذا اور بیماری سے پاک زندگی کے لئے مستند ادویات کے بارے میں زیادہ سے زیادہ شعور پیدا کیا ہے۔ لوگوں نے سوشل میڈیا کا مناسب استعمال کرکے عالمی وبائی مرض سے لڑنے کی تربیت حاصل کی۔

کلیدی الفاظ: سوشل میڈیا، صحت مند طرزِ زندگی، کووڈ۔۱۹

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has exposed the health capacity of the whole world including the developed countries with state-of-the-art modern medical facilities. Pakistan, being an underdeveloped nation, has a weak health system and is fatally vulnerable to infectious diseases (Sultan & Khan, 2013). Most of the public rely on traditional medication for the treatment of even life-threatening and critical diseases. Whereas, after the spread of Corona virus in Pakistan, mainstream media and social media disseminated different messages pertaining precautions and medication (Khan et al., 2020) of the disease. Even though, the corona virus wasn't studied and apprehended in laboratories yet but messages started to float from different sources as if the treatment of the disease has been discovered (Apuke & Omar, 2021). All of this situation arises as people started panicking with the myth that this virus will bring a chaos which will eliminate the whole world and there will never be any treatment or cure of this disease (Nicomedes & Avila, 2020).

Due to less first-hand information of the disease and helplessness, in this regard, resulted in following of every information helpful to kill the virus (Peters, et. al, 2020; Wen et al. 2020), whether it was verified from authentic sources or not. Social media including facebook, twitter, youtube (D'Souza et al., 2020)tiktok and whatsapp, were the virtual platforms, during the lockdown, which helped people in understanding the disease and ways to counter it(Drouin, et al., 2020). People's behavior and attitude of social media usage improved during the pandemic situation (Saah, et. al., 2021; Al-Dmour et al., 2020) and they started to rely on the virtual channels of information as there was very less outdoor mobilization and social interaction. Staszkiewicz et.al, (2020) studied different responses of social media during pandemic. The social media was just not providing a problem-solving arena for the global world but it became a place where much of the misunderstanding and miscommunication spread at a very high proportion.

Moreover, at the time of technological advancement, people have become more proactive and preemptive with regards to attaining any relevant information (Lalot, et al., 2021;

Mukhtar, 2021; Zheng, Khan & Hussain, 2020) to counter any potential threat. People have adapted new ways and transformed their personal lives according to covid19 pandemic (Zwanka& Buff, 2021). They have improvised health practices as per the information circulating around the world through social media platforms. Home-based exercise culture has evolved due to the restrictions and limitation of immobilization. People have developed more understanding of fake and true news through experiences observed on social networking sites (Chang, Chien & Shen, 2021; Alschuler, et al., 2020).

The provision of medical facilities and health services lack a great deal in Pakistan. The poor state of conditions and public approach cannot bear the pressure of a pandemic disease which hasn't been identified and resolved with its vaccination invention. The only thing an under developed country, like Pakistan, could do was to be preemptive and proactive to stay away from the disease. The social media, in this regard, kept the population engaged and in continuous interaction (Yang et al., 2020) where they could discuss different ways to survive under unfavorable and unclear circumstances. Dependency on social media for the sake of updated information about the virus and its treatment increased since the advent of the virus worldwide. Abundance of time at home allowed people to spend much of their time on social media which gave them opportunity to utilize social media in different new ways which they were not aware of or not used to of it earlier. This research focuses on social media's contribution on people's health consciousness and hygiene activities during pandemic situation. Social media became a consistent and lasting partner to the people who used it for exercises to keep their bodies active, healthy diet tips to keep their immunity strong, medication and sanitization to be protected by the possible attack by the virus. Social media came out to be an important platform for people's understanding and education about a disease and possible remedies and treatments. Therefore, the researcher devised the objectives for this study as a) to study the level of social media engagement among general public during Covid19 and b) to evaluate the social media users' practical application of virtual information on real lives. And questions were developed to find out that a) what was the level of social media engagement during covid-19 among general public? and b) how social media users practically applied the virtual information on their real lives?

Review of Literature

Chan et al. (2020) highlighted the significance of different info graphic models regarding useful updated information during Covid-19. They studied the first-hand information dissemination by the paramedics who, by experiencing various conditions directly, can update, guide and correct the general public. The use of social media was found to be the quickest, accessible and feasible platform which the forefront medical staff utilized to not just train their organization but to connect with the whole world. Chan et al., shared info graphic models applied in different developed countries in the very early stages of Covid-19 outbreak and later followed by underdeveloped countries. Their study concluded that the info graphic models can effectively communicate a message when floated on social media by authentic medical resources, they can be trusted and followed accordingly by the people who really need the right information.

La et al. (2020) studied Vietnamese model to tackle covid-19 situation right after its global outreach. The Vietnamese government and local administration mobilized the civilians with the help of available traditional and digital resources. The abrupt and right diffusion of information by the government with media, especially social media, helped in reaching out at the ground level and communicating about the disease and remedies to deal with it. This study provides a look into how a poor country dealt with a global problem with serious approach towards handling it with social media and engaging its population to a platform to be incorporated in the best possible way.

Jiménez-Pavón et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of exercise during the pandemic as a therapy to remain mentally and bodily active. Different types of exercises (Rodríguez et al., 2020) were opted and practiced by different age groups but elderly people were observed to have followed the fitness therapy more seriously than others. Freitas & Stedefeldt, (2020) investigated people's eating behaviors during covid-19 as people relied on healthy diets due to the fear of not getting ill or get deprived of strong immunity due to unhygienic foods. Onchonga et al., (2020) described the process of self-medication by the general public and applying every possible method shared by the sources which even they would not consider authentic but to at least give it a try to miraculously survive the virus. The emergency conditions and the element of uncertainty prevailed so much that people started resolving the medical problem through their conviction based believes and unreliable medical treatments.

Pu et al., (2020) did an online questionnaire survey to identify home-based exercise trends among Chinese respondents. Firstly, they were able to differentiate the exercise trends among different age groups, genders and marital statuses. Secondly, the covid19 pandemic created a feeling of uncertainty among those people who were regular in outdoor exercises. Hence, they had to transform their exercise routine by staying at home during covid lockdowns. People brought behavioral changes with regards to health consciousness and developed new understanding of maintaining healthy routines during covid19 pandemic (Pu et al., 2020).

Zhang, et al., (2021) studied that social media gratification increased during covid19 pandemic. People spent more time on social media platforms to collect information based on their health consciousness. They concluded that there was abundance of misconceptions but negative information shed off as soon as new inquiries were made in understanding the virus and its variants. People with health devotion were applying all the recommended medication, precautions and exercises which could keep them healthy to fight against the disease. Qi & Ploeger, (2021) identified a change in Chinese consumers' food behaviors. They observed that people started consuming more green foods containing fruits and vegetables while avoiding any kind of meat. As in the beginning of covid19 spread, it was widely assumed that the virus was inflicted through animal meat and was feared for further cause of spread. People opted green food as not just healthy but fearing the presence of virus in meat.

Alam et al., (2021) stated that during the self-quarantining by different people initiated various mental health problems. They studied multiple factors which effected peoples'

behavior and attitude towards the life and daily routine. Healthy exercises, productive activities, constructive tasks and virtual livelihood developed a feeling of survival among public's minds and helped in fighting it back.

Uses and Gratification Theory

This research relates with the audiences' approach towards utilizing the medium of social media (Tanta, Mihovilović & Sablić, 2014) for their purpose of attaining information about the ongoing scenarios of covid-19. This theory incorporates with the current study's aspects of social media usage to adhere with the updates regarding pandemic situation, finding online training sessions for health fitness, diet planning, medication and sanitization processes. The audience greatly gratified their needs to avoid isolation by connecting through social media apps and websites (Apuke & Omar, 2020). They not just benefited from the content for mere entertainment but to regularize their life style according to a virtual world proceeding during a pandemic situation (Bae, Sung, & Kwon, 2021; He, & Harris, 2020).

Research Design

This research applied quantitative approach with survey method. A sample of 200 respondents from the metropolitan city of Punjab, Lahore, was selected through convenient sampling technique. Respondents from four age brackets; 15 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44 and 45 and above were divided into four segments by stratified sampling technique. Only those respondents were given the questionnaires who had education of at least graduation and fulfilled the condition of using the five selected apps; facebook, twitter, youtube, tiktok and whatsapp, for at least 3 hours a day.

The data was collected through online survey questionnaire which includes healthy exercise scale, healthy diet scale, proper medication scale, sanitization scale, precautionary measurement scale and medical understanding of disease scale. A T-test was applied to check differential analysis among the respondents from different age groups.

Findings and Discussion

The collected data shows general publics' dependency and gratification of social media apps for the sake of multiple reasons. **RQ1** intended to acquire and analyze the data from the respondents and indicates towards high level of involvement on relying social media content. The usage of social media apps among the respondents increased as all the respondents who were primarily selected on the bases of using social media apps for at least three hours a day were found to be connected online for more than 6 hours a day.

RQ2 inquired about the applicability of social media content, regarding health, on real lives by the respondents. Respondents of the age of 45 and above were more conscious about their exercise (18%) routines to keep their body and mind active, modified their diet (21%) plans to keep their immunity strong with natural resources, maintained their proper medication

(23%), kept their bodies sanitized from germs (20%), took precautionary measures (22%) to avoid any unfavorable circumstances and sought medical understanding of new diseases (22%) through the usage of social media apps during covid-19 situation. Respondents with age (15 to 24) took precautionary measures (60%) and learnt about medical terms, diseases and their treatments (58%) much more seriously than other applications of social media content with very less seriousness in dieting (10%). Respondents from the age bracket (25-34) and (35-44) were serious about medical precautions and knowledge about diseases and their control (64%). While more non-seriousness was observed in dieting and sanitizing. Respondents with low age brackets relied on online food orders, which got promoted during pandemic manifolds due to restriction on mobilization. The only entertainment left to the people was eating food. So, they became less worried about the quality of food and its hygienic nature. While respondents with high age bracket preferred homemade healthy diets to look after their immunity system.

As the pandemic prolonged and new studies emerged about the nature of virus, its habitats and mechanisms, people started adjusting with the pandemic. The respondents were observed to be getting less concerned about sanitizing or keeping themselves intact from germs as they were at the beginning of the pandemic situation. Respondents indicated towards false information spread by various social media users which were initially applied by them but with more advancement in knowing the virus and its precautions, people became aware through the same medium and opted for the specific information and its application on their daily health routines.

Data Presentation
Age Wise Analysis

Respondents of Age Bracket (15-24)

Age bracket	very serious	Serious	normal	Not serious	Not serious at all	Total
Exercise	2	19	6	14	9	50
	4%	38%	12%	28%	18%	100%
Healthy dieting	0	5	4	12	29	50
	0%	10%	8%	24%	58%	100%
Proper medication	3	17	13	10	7	50
	6%	34%	26%	20%	14%	100%
Sanitizing from germs	4	14	15	9	8	50
	8%	28%	30%	18%	16%	100%
Took Precautionary measures	9	21	8	6	6	50
	18%	42%	16%	12%	12%	100%
Medical under-standing of diseases	13	16	9	7	5	50
	26%	32%	18%	14%	10%	100%

The table shows that the youth of 15 to 24 years of age took precautionary measurements and were more concern about proper medication. While the trend online food deliveries created more justification for them to eat more junk food and less healthy diets.

Respondents of Age Bracket (25-34)

Age bracket	very serious	Serious	normal	Not serious	Not serious at all	Total
Exercise	4 8%	18 36%	9 18%	9 18%	10 20%	50 100%
healthy dieting	1 2%	6 12%	7 14%	10 20%	26 52%	50 100%
proper medication	5 10%	17 34%	4 8%	9 18%	15 30%	50 100%
sanitizing from germs	6 12%	20 40%	8 16%	12 24%	4 8%	50 100%
Took Precautionary measures	10 20%	22 44%	7 14%	8 16%	3 6%	50 100%
medical understanding of diseases	14 28%	18 36%	6 12%	7 14%	5 10%	50 100%

The respondents of age bracket from 25 to 34 years were also not serious about healthy dieting and instead they followed the same eating trends as youngsters. But they focus more on the precautionary measurements, medication and exercises.

Respondents of Age Bracket (35-44)

	Age bracket	very serious	Serious	normal	Not serious	Not serious at all	Total
1.	**exercise**	4 8%	21 42%	5 10%	10 20%	10 20%	50 100%
2.	**healthy dieting**	1 2%	10 20%	4 8%	19 38%	16 32%	50 100%
3.	**proper medication**	4 8%	18 36%	7 14%	12 24%	9 18%	50 100%
4.	**sanitizing from germs**	6 12%	22 44%	5 10%	8 16%	9 18%	50 100%
5.	**Took Precautionary measures**	11 22%	21 42%	4 8%	8 16%	6 12%	50 100%
6.	**medical under-standing of diseases**	14 28%	21 42%	5 10%	7 14%	3 6%	50 100%

The table shows that respondents of 35 to 44 years of age were more concern about their health and medication and took serious actions regarding disease control.

Respondents of Age Bracket (45 and above)

	Age bracket	very serious	Serious	normal	Not serious	Not serious at all	Total
1	**Exercise**	8 16%	28 56%	6 12%	6 12%	2 4%	50 100%
2	**Healthy dieting**	9 18%	31 62%	4 8%	4 8%	2 4%	50 100%
3	**Proper medication**	15 30%	29 58%	2 4%	3 6%	1 2%	50 100%
4	**Sanitizing from germs**	12 24%	27 54%	4 8%	5 10%	2 4%	50 100%
5	**Took precautionary measures**	14 28%	29 58%	4 8%	2 4%	1 2%	50 100%
6	**medical under-standing of diseases**	15 30%	27 54%	3 6%	4 8%	1 2%	50 100%

The age group ranging from 45 years or above were more concern about their health and took all possible measures seriously. They were serious about taking healthy diets, proper medications, precautionary measurements regarding health control and updated information about disease and its developing situation.

Overall Analysis

Variables	Very serious				Serious				Normal				Not Serious				Not Serious at all				Total
	15-24	25-34	35-44	Above 45	15-24	25-34	35-44	Above 45	15-24	25-34	35-44	Above 45	15-24	25-34	35-44	Above 45	15-24	25-34	35-44	Above 45	
Exercise	2 1%	4 2%	4 2%	8 4%	19 10%	18 9%	21 11%	28 14%	6 3%	9 5%	5 2.50%	6 3.00%	14 7.00%	9 4.50%	10 5.00%	6 3.00%	9 4.50%	10 5.00%	10 5.00%	2 1.00%	200 100%
healthy dieting	0 0%	1 1%	1 1%	9 5%	5 3%	6 3%	10 5%	31 16%	4 2%	7 4%	4 2%	4 2%	12 6%	10 5%	19 10%	4 2%	29 15%	26 13%	16 8%	2 1%	200 100%
proper medication	3 2%	5 3%	4 2%	15 8%	17 9%	17 9%	18 9%	29 15%	13 7%	4 2%	7 4%	2 1%	10 5%	9 5%	12 6%	3 2%	7 4%	15 8%	9 5%	22 11%	200 100%
Sanitizing from germs	4 2%	6 3%	6 3%	12 6%	14 7%	20 10%	22 11%	27 14%	15 8%	8 4%	5 3%	4 2%	9 5%	12 6%	8 4%	5 3%	8 4%	4 2%	9 5%	2 1%	200 100%
Took precau-tionary measures	9 5%	10 5%	11 6%	14 7%	21 11%	22 11%	21 11%	29 15%	8 4%	7 4%	4 2%	4 2%	6 3%	8 4%	8 4%	2 1%	6 3%	3 2%	6 3%	1 1%	200 100%
medical under-standing of diseases	13 7%	14 7%	14 7%	15 8%	16 8%	18 9%	21 11%	27 14%	9 5%	6 3%	5 3%	3 2%	7 4%	7 4%	7 4%	4 2%	5 3%	5 3%	3 2%	1 1%	200 100%

The overall analysis of the collected data denotes that youngers were less concern about diets and exercise than respondents with age higher than 35 years. Respondents with higher age ratio were more serious about their health issues and took serious steps in terms of medication and precautionary measures regarding corona virus and other diseases as well.

Conclusions

The study concludes that social media users in Pakistan took virtual platforms seriously and acted upon the shared knowledge by other users. It kept the population knitted with a common concern of uncertainty and hope too. Social media transformed people's life through various new usages and implications by letting the audience gratify their needs regarding health concerns. People started using social media for not only for fun and entertainment but to stay connected to their loved ones, family members, friends and with the whole world. Their food habits, healthy activities, medication and disease knowledge increased with abundance of content produced by millions of social media users. People have become more united and prepared to handle such unannounced pandemic by sharing their knowledge through social media and applying it on their lives accordingly.

Recommendations

This study can be a future analysis for those social scientists who intend to explore and analyze the increasing trend in Pakistan about the social media usage among not just teenagers but elders as well. This study can be related with the changing trends among Pakistani users about a productive gratification of social media in building businesses of online health tips, virtual fitness clubs, online doctors and medical services, public health services campaigns and much more.

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Dr. Abul Hassan is Assistant Professor in the School of Creative Arts, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan.

Dr. Tanveer Hussain is an Assistant Professor in the School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

Abdul Basit is Lecturer in the School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.