COMMUNITY MEDIA IN THE ERA OF PANDEMICS:
A CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLORATION

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Abstract

Community Media is persuasive, scalable, fast, influential and strong, and derives its strength from its constant relationship with communities. It is responsive to the needs of people and has the to empower them through knowledge. Community media is responsible for the incorporation of diverse voices within the community, and its dissemination and development processes underscore community engagement. Community media played a very important role during lockdown, which happen all over the world due to Covid-19.The community media didn't only, made people aware about the virus but also helped them to get basic amenities during the whole lockdown. The evaluation of community media in the context of development communication is rational, constructive and pragmatic. Community media is by the small group of people and whose network is also limited to a particular region but it was used as the strongest medium during the pandemic. Community media during pandemic plays a very important role to make people aware about the myths and fake news that was spreading all over during lockdown and was creating a pressure and tension among the people.

The purpose of the article is to make people aware about the Community media. The history of Community media and what was the role of community media in the era of pandemics. There will be the inclusion of case studies of all over India that how they create awareness among their region and helped people with knowledge and also make them believe that there is someone around them who are still listening to them. They keep their audience informed about everything from information about containment zones, the number of positive patients, where they are being treated in the district, the areas that need to be avoided, to the details of lockdown and everything in the middle. They station present information in a simplified and demystified manner, which can be easily understood by these rural communities as opposed to the complex advisories given by the authorities.

Keywords: Community media, pandemic, myths, Radio, newspaper, social media

INTRODUCTION

Communication is at the core of who we are human beings. We communicate and interact; we share knowledge and ideas, all of which are made possible by interaction are formed and sustained through communication, our education and work depend on communication, and our involvement in justice, political and public life is all negotiated through communication. The position of "communication" in human rights is generally seen in the light of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states that everyone has the "right to freedom of opinion and expression," and the "right to seek, receive and communicate information and ideas through any media and across borders." Article 19 of the UDHR guarantees the right to express views and to share knowledge and ideas in a number of ways. Communication is not only key to how many people enjoy their human rights—it is also the

means by which people demand or assert their rights. It is then, when rights need to be 'exercised,' that we might recognize people having a voice' or need to be heard, through activism, protest, or legal challenges. The ideals of 'speaking out against inequality' and of people having 'fair voices' are respected in many cultures, but there are always voices that are less, or even less, heard. People with communication difficulties are at risk of becoming part of the 'unheard' community.

Thus, introduction of satellite communication in the 1960s marked a period of unparalleled global communication between distant people and locations and opened new avenues for more and more people realizing their right to communication. Certain analysts, particularly those invested in the scientific and corporate interests of the English-speaking world, considered these developments as the beginning of a new age of international collaboration, stability and prosperity. However, these ideas were met with substantial criticism from people who were wary of imposition of Western ideals and ideologies on non-Western cultures.

Throughout the 1970s, governments addressed the topic of communication rights in the United Nations and other foreign bodies. While the Cold War strategy confounded these debates, the emerging consensus favored the democratic reform of global communication networks. Eventually, the McBride report proposed the institutional overhaul of the global connectivity system. Predictably, both the United States and the United Kingdom have withdrawn from UNESCO in protest at the findings and conclusions of the reports. This development set the stage, in the 1980s and 1990s, for the emergence of neoliberalism—a regulatory theory that promotes market-based approaches to economic, social and cultural policy—and all but guaranteed that the debate on communication rights at the intergovernmental level took place mostly for the interests of multinational corporations above the interests of people, communities and societies.

Though, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community organizers, scholars, media staff and other civil society organizations have taken up the cause of communication rights in a variety of international venues, most notably the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Addressing a variety of concerns, civil society advocates have amplified and broadened mainstream awareness of media rights (Civil Society Declaration to the World Summit on the Information Society, 2004). Communication rights go beyond mere freedom of opinion and speech to include areas such as democratic media governance, participation in one's own culture, linguistic rights, rights to enjoy the fruits of human imagination, education, privacy, peaceful assembly and self-determination. There are topics of inclusion and exclusion, consistency and accessibility. In short, they are problems of human dignity

COMMUNITY MEDIA: UNDERSTANDING

In the social economy, the role of the media is a dominant element among the various catalytic factors involved in strengthening and building communities. The media plays a significant part not only in expressing the community's grievances, but also in playing a constructive part in social cohesion, by bringing people together and consolidating the ties between the clashing forces in the community. However the mass media seems to be facing a global identity crisis. These huge businesses face the dilemma of identifying as corporations and infrastructure for profits or an important source of truth for society. This sudden crisis in the identity and

accountability of the media demonstrated the value of community media. Community media are understood as autonomous; community specific media working for social gain and not profit. In every area of the world, they are present as social movements and these community-based organizations have found ways of communicating their interests, their cultures and their problems. Community media was perceived to create an alternative both for government-sponsored and private commercial broadcasters. They offer communities access to knowledge and expression, promote dialogue, information at community level, and contribute to public decision-making.

According to the definition by the International Program for the Development of Communications, "community-based media ensures media pluralism, diversity of content and representation of the different groups and interests of society [...] encourage open dialogue and transparency of governance at the local level and offer voice to the voiceless."

Radio, video, television, blogs, social media—all sorts of development work take place in community media centers. Media literacy is gradually finding its place as a valued discipline within community media, as a fundamental underpinning of the many outreach projects that community media have made. Community media is seen as a "third sector" in the media ecosystem, offering a three-tier media landscape that incorporates public service, commercial and community media.

Community radio defines itself more by its purpose than by its scale or venue. It normally evokes a grassroots mentality and a bias towards a free exchange of thoughts and ideas. It seeks to educate and entertain, to inform and entertain, and to build a wide tent in which its listeners can engage and challenge each other as well as their political leadership. These operations tend to be smaller, community-based and controlled, depending on local support that can include advertising, but are most frequently expressed in donations and volunteerism. Community media also fill the vacuum created by larger mainstream media outlets operating under various imperatives that do not involve under-represented or oppressed groups in a society.

The rise of community media is often linked to broader political change, especially the deepening of democracy and the strengthening of civil society. It also builds on the recognition that inspiring and giving voice to people who face poverty and disadvantage can more effectively accomplish development goals. Where they have been developed, community media may play a particular and crucial role in promoting civic involvement, strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity and giving voice to disadvantaged and otherwise marginalized groups.

There are four main characteristics of community-based media-localism, storytelling, empowerment and diverse involvement. Localism is the first characteristic. Community media are mainly produced by and by citizens of a particular geographical area. Community media helps to describe where people live and how they relate to each other and also to represent local values and cultures. It shows that the most common content is related to local news and music, followed by local wisdom content.

ROOTED IN THE COMMUNITY
Community media is produced predominantly for and by the diversity of people, who live and

are inevitably associated with each other, grounded in unavoidable, rich, and complex social relationships. They're for discussing these local concerns only. They help to describe where we live and how we relate to each other. They represent local values and culture of these communities; very simply put community media cannot be outsourced.

Over the long term, local media can create a cohesive narrative of the progress of a community and enable people to formulate goals and proposals to change their situation. The media will help contextualize national development projects within the structure of the Society and get them closer to their intended beneficiaries. Efficient local media can also help people understand the past and evolution of injustice or prejudice and provide them with the perspective they need to make informed decisions. With this knowledge people have the means to engage in democratic processes and to shape their own futures locally and nationally.

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION IN AND OF THE COMMUNITY
Community media is mission-driven in supporting the local community. It focuses not only on community engagement but also most importantly on the inclusion of diverse voices in the community, and their development. They aim to reflect the demographics of their people – social economic, racial, cultural, political, age – in their programming. And the programming is not just about the community; it is created in partnership with the community. Community media outlets consider themselves to be accountable and open to the people they represent, and welcome their viewers as producers and regulators of content.

Community media is responsible for the incorporation of diverse voices within the community, and its dissemination and development processes underscore community engagement. These community media represent and welcome their viewers, build in cooperation with the community they work in and bring about reconciliation and understanding between people in the community and the outside world. Cases of 'micro-participation' facilitated by community media lead to greater 'macro-participation' as citizens consciously adopt democratic attitudes and behaviors and play a pivotal role in a healthy democracy.

Community media places communication resources in the hands of people, sharing access with non-professionals, and promoting self-expression and community building. In their truest form these organization are the foremost tool of empowerment for a community. Many offer training programs to build the capacity of community members to use media technologies; others help communities grapple with media-saturated society through media literacy training; and others emphasize economic and labor growth through skills training and content creation. The media communities are made a medium for personal, community, and ethnic speech and growth. They can also encourage audiences to act to change politics because they simply offer a voice to the voiceless and often an overlooked community.

CITIZEN JOURNALISM
Professional journalists are at the center of a reputable media setting. However they are by no means the only ones to regularly chronicle the world around them. New technology offers people an unparalleled ability to educate others. In the event of a crisis, people reporting as journalists could be the only way to bring human rights abuses and other violations of a criminal or environmental nature to the attention of the general public. Citizen reporting can

also be a way of operating against censorship, after demonstrations or political upheaval. When information becomes decentralized, censorship becomes less effective because it can no longer be contained in media outlets.

As mentioned above storytelling is another important feature and it is rooted in the idea of participative journalism. Group members share these tales with the history and culture of the community. Public media is a channel for this. It enables members to share their story and experience. Community media has the potential to minimize loneliness and alienation by encouraging people to tell their stories to others, stories can initiate and unite a deliberative process between community members.

The third is **empowerment**. Power is the central principle of empowerment. The basis of empowerment is focused on the belief that power can alter and even be expanded. Community media is a process to empower people, to place communication tools in the hands of individuals, to share access with non-professionals, and to promote self-expression and community building. Public media empowers people by giving voice to the voiceless.

Community engagement is important in the context of media and communication because it creates a channel for dialogue between organization's (Government or NGOs) and communities, which is of utmost importance for social development. Community engagement can be positively used to bring about a change in local government policies to better address the issues plaguing that community, improve service and welfare provisions, and most importantly help pave the way for a community's envisioned goal. **Only when every voice howsoever marginalized gets an opinion true development of the community can be imagined**. An effective process of engagement at grassroots level will help bringing about a global impact.

Community media can take many forms – for example, cassette tape, video, public address systems, and printing – but it is community radio that has in particular, come to the fore as an open medium, low cost and, sometimes, common and participatory. Today, community radio is not just based in Europe and the Americas. It is widespread across Africa; becoming a rising force in Asia and the Pacific, and it has reached the mainstream dialogue by architecture experts and agencies.

VOICE OF THE VOICELESS

In the Ninth United Nations Round Table on Communications for Development, UN agencies and other experts identified the need for governments to create a legal and accessible structure that favors the right to freedom of speech and the emergence of freedom of expression, pluralistic information systems, including identification of the unique and critical role of community media in providing access contact for alienated and oppressed communities.

Community media are the programs in the media and organizations that are autonomous, civil society oriented and work in the social sphere towards objectives rather than private financial benefits. They are usually run by community-based organizations, local NGOs, workers' organizations, educational institutions, religious or cultural organizations or alliances with one or more of these civil society organizations.

The development of community media is a tale of individuals and groups striving to speak out and be heard. Community radio has provided a means of communication empowerment and self-reliance. It has helped people to engage in dialogue about their circumstances and livelihoods. It has also contributed to the defense of cultural and linguistic diversity. It is a tale in which the achievement of social and development goals has been closely connected to the fight for human and political rights and in particular, the right to freedom of speech.

Noiselessness and powerlessness have come to be seen as main aspects of poverty, while democracy, justice and civil rights are seen as not only necessarily beneficial, but as directly leading to the realization of human security, well-being and opportunity. Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize-winning economist, has repeatedly and forcefully argued that no big famine has ever existed in any independent country with a democratic system of government and a reasonably free press. He has given four reasons for this-

First, he claims that freedom of speech and the right to communicate are fundamentally required for the well being and quality of human life. The repression of people's right to interact directly decreases the quality of life, irrespective of such an authoritarian country that imposes such a restriction offers another social and economic security.

Second, it may have a significant protective role in giving voice to the neglected and vulnerable. The means of speaking out will make a huge contribution to human security. Political elites faced with public pressure in the media have a clear incentive to take timely action to avert disasters and counteract resource inequity.

Third, the media have an informational role in disseminating awareness and facilitating objective scrutiny. This role is critical to motivate and keep elites accountable.

Fourth, the media have a vital role to play in the creation of value, allowing the public to respond to change and locally appropriating awareness and information.

Communication policies that guarantee the right to freedom of speech and access to information directly contribute to the achievement of development objectives. Policies that restrict these rights can have a negative effect. Without access to voice, marginalized people are unable to engage in the discourse or share their views on public policies that directly impact them. Without access to information, disadvantaged people are not informed of their rights and entitlements, are unable to contest decisions and lack the knowledge to take meaningful steps to change their conditions.

In this era of one touch communication the global network of community broadcasters has expanded, the development of new communication that provide global access to information has facilitated it. The emergence of new information and communications technologies has contributed to economic globalization and allowed new international social movements to proliferate. But it also threatens to amplify the gross asymmetry in people's access to knowledge and communication, empowerment and self-reliance. Liberating potential of the Internet has brought a wider awareness of the importance of access to knowledge and information, which has in turn brought a renewed interest in traditional media such as radio.

New innovations not only alter media dynamics when it comes to content, they are also a major factor in developing new avenues for media to communicate with their viewers. Blogs, smart phones and numerous other online devices put content providers in closer contact with customers. Feedback can be instantaneous. For the first time in the history of the media

industry, especially in the most well-developed media markets, there is as much information coming from customers as it is coming from conventional and new means of communication. Managing this ebb and flow of information is becoming increasingly important to the future of the media sector. Bonds are being reinforced between these groups and with this deeper link; there are heightened hopes that users will be listened to. Encouraging engagement is also vital to the sustainability of media outlets in a dynamic marketplace, while also offering an opportunity to engage with viewers. From an audience perspective, it means that it can influence content in a very proactive manner and allow individuals to access a ready-made forum from which they can express their opinions.

THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF COMMUNITY MEDIA

Local and community-based media have been identified as having a special role to play for individuals and societies facing poverty, alienation and marginalization. They can help provide access to knowledge and speech, both in local and vernacular languages.

In order to understand the unique position of community media, we must consider the two dominant modes of broadcasting in the world today, separated by public or private ownership. There are several strong models of public broadcasting with independent governance and editorial structures and a variety of programs of public interest. But many state-owned public media are also not fully separate from the government. Instead of genuinely representing the public interest, they remain the government's instrument in power. They maintain a one-way mode of communication instead of conversation with their audiences. Private commercial media may lead to a diversity of options, but appear to pay less attention to the interests and concerns of the weaker parts of society. In many countries, the rising concentration of ownership has had the effect of reducing the diversity of private media. Media concentration has allowed powerful media companies to emerge with immense political leverage while remaining accountable only to their private owners and the marketplace.

Community broadcasting has arisen from civil society in order to find a place alongside existing public and private media. Community broadcasting may be regarded as a third field of the media landscape-independent, with social and not commercial goals. Community broadcasting has grown in response to the needs of grassroots social movements and community-based groups to find an open and inexpensive means of voicing their own interests, concerns, cultures and languages, and to create an alternative to state-owned public broadcasters and the growth of private commercial media. The presence and practice of community broadcasting is an expression of a more participatory approach towards democracy and the development of large and dynamic civil society organizations. It may be considered a form of public service broadcasting, but it is a public service broadcasting not from the top down, but from the grassroots up.

MODERN COMMUNITY MEDIA AND ITS HISTORICAL ORIGINS

The idea of community engagement and communication is not something unique to modern era in India. In the widely diverse and rich civilization of the Indian subcontinent community level engagement and facilitation played an important role in gluing together the vast cultures under a power singularity. Some or other form of this engagement can be traced as far back as the Mauryan King Ashoka who declared and transmitted his Dhamma through a similar strategy.

The King tried to convey the subject of Dhamma, a matter of state policy, to his people through various ambassadors who promulgated them in local languages and dialect throughout the stretch of his empire even engraving them on stones and pillars. Community media was very prevalent in India during the Middle Ages, in the Mughal era; the postal services of Waqai Navis, Sawanih Navis, Khufia Navis and Dak Runner were responsible for this.

The rich culture and folk arts in Indian subcontinent facilitated the development and continuance of this culture of community level engagement and communication. Even before literature became a dominant source of community engagement during British Raj, the natives of this subcontinent communicated through folk songs, dances and theater. The plot of these folk arts was often based on the lifestyle and concerns faced by that particular community. Indian folk and tribal dances have been conceived and performed by different groups to express their ideas, feelings and happiness. Various groups throughout different states in India perform different dances to interact and convey their issues and norms. The skills required and the creativity of dances on the part of the community primarily influences performance, known as media efficiency.

Sherdukpen, a village in the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh, performs a folk dance, BardoChham. This specific culture practices this community media to reflect the triumph of good over bad. The language used by Sherdukpen is not specifically related to neighboring languages. Their language identity is still at stake and has not yet been accepted on a wide scale. Thus, their performed dance style is a tool that speaks of their socio-economic and cultural indicators. Yadavs or yaduvanshis, a group that believes in themselves as the descendants of Krishna in the state of Chhattisgarh, practise Raut Nacha. This dance form, as a means of community media, seeks to preserve the identity of the caste and helps to transmit the cultural norms of the Yadavs in the state.

The evaluation of community media in the context of development communication is rational, constructive and pragmatic. In order to make community media more efficient and impartial, a perfect combination of conventional media and new technology-based mass media is a panacea for many communication problems. The marriage of these two media will amplify the process, resulting in further developments. When we try to understand the roles of these dance types from a communication point of view, they often point to group communication in nature. Even today, diverse cultures are adept at various folk media for more contact on various themes for grassroots audiences. In order to reach out to specific communities in the Indian states, Song and Drama Division, part of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Indian government has used conventional media.

Similarly, Ghoomar, Kalbelia, KachchhiGhodi are performed in Rajasthan. ParaiAttam or Thappattam, Kummi, Kolattam, Karagattam or Karagam, MayilAttam or Peacock Dance, Paampuattam or Snake Dance, Oyilattam, Puliyattam, PoikalKudiraiAttam, Bommalattam, TheruKoothu are common dance forms that communicate various social themes in Tamil Nadu from time to time. Mayur Nritya or Peacock Dance and Charukala in Uttar Pradesh perform social functions. Alkap is a dance form that is popular in the rural pockets of Bengal, while the communities of the Malda district perform Domni. Apart from various dance styles, folk theatres – Tamasha, Powada or Powala, Keertana, Yakshganga, Dashavatar, Nautanki, Ramlila and

Raslila, Jatra – exist in various Indian states and have been well received by the communities. Showing concern or targeting a specific group or community through any media is not a new situation, as has been the case since the advent of the press in India. During British Raj, community media played a crucial role in the fight for Indian independence Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi edited newspapers and periodicals like Young India, in which he fostered the philosophy of non-violence among the Indians in the fight for independence against the British. He was also very active in operating the Indian Opinion newspaper, advocating the civil rights of the Indian immigrant community in South Africa against racial discrimination. Gandhi related the Indian community to the spirit of Satyagraha in order to get rid of political, economic and social injustice dominated by the apartheid regime.. In order to awaken diverse communities from all over the nation to freedom struggle, journalists and newspapers such as Young India, Navjeevan, Nav Shakti, Bombay Chronicle, Janmabhumi, Tribune, Bharat-Mitra, Kesari, SambadKaumudi, The Statesman, Hindustan Times, National Herald, The Hindus took the baton to fight against British rule. Moreover, Indian society was initially filled with social taboos, creating obstacles to social growth. Certain periodicals and newspapers like Harijan, Mahatma Gandhi's HarijanSevak and HarijanBandhu; Mahadev Govind Rand's Gyan Prakash; Ram Mohan Roy's SambadKaumudi and Mirat-ul-Akbar were published in order to mobilize different parts of communities across states for a classless and taboo free society. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, considered the father of the Indian Renaissance, published a weekly newspaper, SambadKaumudi, which was used as a medium to raise the consciousness of the Indian community and campaigned for the abolition of Sati Pratha and disaffection towards British rule. However, his media were more closely related to the Bengali communities in the fight against social and political odds.

Modern day means of community engagement now focus on issues of development and rights like Janavani (People's Voice), a rural newspaper published by Odisha since 2004,that focuses on rural poor communities in the state. Similarly, Gaon Connection is a weekly newspaper in Hindi, published from Uttar Pradesh. This kind of media is attempting to cover rural problems and has thus attracts rural viewers. It is also in the interest of providing rural market intelligence to business establishments that can change the face of rural India. Issues of portable water, sanitation, education, women, and corruption have little room in the mainstream newspapers nowadays. So, these community newspapers have the space to report and convey these issues in a journalistic manner. In addition, this kind of media has certain priorities like social development and poverty alleviation, women and development, children's rights, Dalits and tribal peoples and human rights. In order to encourage the active participation of rural poor, the goal is to train rural youth to become rural reporters in every village in the state.

Community radio stations are another form of participative media that is becoming popular at several places in India. Though a modern and interactive method of community media these stations have faced a serious obstruction in the policy landscape of India. The Supreme Court (SC) of India in 1995 declared airwaves as 'public property' to be used for 'public good' (in a case not relevant to the Community media) and since was launched a nearly decade-long effort to democratize the airwaves, which is undoubtedly the most critical media policy reform initiative led by civil society in the world. Indian Community Radios have faced everything from expensive bidding competitions to licensing issues to usurping policies of governments but have managed to continue their fight for existence while trying to fulfill their objectives of giving

voice to their communities. In a world with a burgeoning impact on multi-dimensional audio-visual content, community radio has been able to thrive for more than a decade, all because of the 'community first' approach. A genuinely democratic platform—by the people, of the people and of the people—community radio, in its true meaning, is intended to produce content for the good of society as well as individual empowerment and empowerment.

Radio Udaan is an online community radio station that started its flight in February 2014. Its primary goal was to bring people from all over the world together to form an inclusive and inspiring community free of all prejudices. Crafted and webcast by a group of 30 visually impaired individuals, this station was the brainchild of the Danish Mahajan. Today, after five years of continuous hard work, Radio Udaan has more than 100 countries and more than 20,000 listeners a month.

Another such example is Apno Radio, which is the first community radio station in Rajasthan. Launched in 2005, with the goal of fostering self-reliance and empowerment for women, it focuses on a variety of social issues affecting rural communities in the state.

A team of poor Dalit people runs Sangam Radio, a community radio format operated by the Deccan Development Society, Telangana. This media has identified and sensitized two greater identities-marginalized castes and so-called weaker gender-in their genesis and present modus operandi. This media offers enough room for participatory growth in the areas of food security, ecological agriculture and alternative education. It is interconnected to 30,000 people in the Medak district of Andhra Pradesh and most significantly, it focuses on the status of Dalit women in the country. Similarly, the community radio station 'Rudi No Radio' under the banner of the SEWA Mahila Trust in the state of Gujarat aims to ensure the participation of women in the community. The media undertakes numerous community engagement projects focused on the themes of cooperatives, self-help organizations, savings and credit schemes. A women's team is running this community radio.

COMMUNITY MEDIA AMIDST A PANDEMIC

Community Media is persuasive, scalable, fast, influential and strong, and derives its strength from its constant relationship with communities. It is responsive to the needs of people and has the capacity to empower them through knowledge. Community radio stations are a reliable source of knowledge to be disseminated in some of the most remote parts of the world and are capable of creating last mile information access.

In the uncertain times of Covid-19 and misinformation, 295 odd community radio stations in India have shown incredible bravery and dedication. They have complemented the work of the district authorities to crack myths and keep them aware of developments in their areas through their community centric coverage and dissemination of information related to the virus. They broadcast newsletters, briefings from the Government of India, as well as from State and District Collectors, Chief Medical Officers and the Police Force.

These media outlets have, without any financial assistance from the State or the Center, ensured that remotest of people are aware of the information on do's and don'ts, steps to be taken to protect oneself and one's neighbor's, the need to wash hands, wear masks, etc. during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Applying all the expertise they have gained over the years, creating resilience within their communities in times of crisis, community media in India has worked tirelessly to save lives. They keep their audience informed about everything from information about containment zones, the number of positive patients, where they are being treated in the district, the areas that need to be avoided, to the details of lockdown and everything in the middle. They station present information in a simplified and demystified manner which can be easily understood by these rural communities as opposed to the complex advisories given by the authorities.

CASE STUDIES

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is the first pandemic in history in which technology and social media are being used on a large scale to keep people healthy, educated, active and connected. The technology we rely on to stay linked and updated often enables and amplifies misinformation that continues to weaken the global response and undermines pandemic control measures.

As the pathogen COVID-19 is a new strain of the virus, there is a significantly limited knowledge on the issue. This in turn, has created a global need for researched and recorded material on the novel virus, while at the same time providing an incentive for people to fill this gap with false knowledge. With the sheer amount of material that flooded media outlets about the same thing and continues to grow by the minute, the line that separates the reliable from the fake is constantly blurred.

Anything that adds intentional fuel to such uncertainties of a global pandemic must at all cost be curbed in the present unpredictable times. Disinformation is very widespread and causes serious harm to public health and wellbeing, if imposed under a lockdown world, so much so that it is called "Infodemic" globally.

In this perilous time, India has faced all the negative effects of a simultaneous 'infodemic' that is spreading at a pace that puts the pandemic to shame. With instances of such false information leading to groups of people gathering in large crowds amid the lockdown, and as recently as a few days ago leading to four Ahmedabad youth, Gujarat has been arrested for spreading false information about the health and well-being of the country's Home Secretary, Mr. Amit Shah. Thus, the effort to counter the pandemic had to be double fold- breaking the chain in spread of virus and breaking the chain of misinformation. This work has been undertaken by the 270 humble community media outlets in the country.

Kerala recorded India's first positive case in early 2020 and a local community radio station, Radio Mattoli, run by the Wayanad Social Service Society in the Wayanad District of Kerala rose to the occassion. This radio station alone reaches almost 8 lakh people and thus proved instrumental in disseminating crucial information during Pandemic.

They suspended most of their programmes and concentrated on the Covid-19 information only. They forwarded government advisories, conducted interviews and busted misinformation to help their rural audiences. The programmes, were run in the local Malayalam language as well as tribal dialect, panaea and other languages. They frequently invited doctors to address the

queries and worries of people and also to discuss the value of hand washing, social distance and masking.

Quite similarly in Assam, Covid-19 became priority for Radio Brahmaputra of MaijanBorsakia village. Special programms on global pandemic were broadcast in conjunction with the District and District Health Departments. They focused on providing authentic information Covid-19 from authentic sources like WHO, UNICEF, MoH&FW in local languages and dialect like Assamese, Sadry and Hajong.

Radio Bulbul of Bhadrak District actively worked with the migrant labors stuck in big cities of Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore. They resolved the queries of these workers on different policies being formulated by government to help them and connected them to local NGOs for immediate help. It broadcast information camps set up to distribute dry rations to migrant labors. Radio Bulbul has two special programs namely Kar BhalaToh Ho Bhala and Katha Re Katha Re centered around Covid-19. Kar BhalaToh Ho Bhala featured 21 programmes on social distancing, importance of blood donation and many more.

Alfaz-e-Mewat a humble radio station in Nuh Haryana, serving 225 villages, has taken up the job to regularly relay authentic information received from the district collector, chief medical officer and other government functionaries to its listeners. Here, even the government authorities used the reach of this station to inform the public about the virus as early as February. Alfaz-e-Mewat runs a special show called 'Savdhaan,' which warns people against false news about the virus. When a countrywide lockdown was imposed in the country Alfaz-e -Mewat started a program called 21 Din 21 Baatein which focused on frequent hand washing benefits of physical distancing, yoga and self learning to spread positivity. Another program they run is Aaj Ka Hero, highlighting stories of individuals that adopted safe methods to stop the spread of virus.

Another such radio in Haryana is Radio Mewat, it undertook the task of sharing credible information and counseling to their largely illiterate listeners. They regularly address the queries of villagers related to lockdown, availability of PDS, problems of farmers regarding standing crops etc. In addition to all this Radio Mewat undertook radio tuitions to help school kids catch up with their lessons while the schools have been indefinitely shut.

The diverse geographical features of the country handicap the locals of remote hilly areas in keeping aware about the world outside and this is where the community media has risen to the occasion. Seven community radio stations have come together in the hills of Uttarakhand to establish a multi-level network that reaches the remotest villages to deal with misinformation about Covid-19.Mandakini kiAwaaz, KumaonVaani, PantnagarJanvani, Radio Zindagee, HimgirikiAwaaz, Heval Vani and Radio Khushi are coordinating with the People's Power Collective, a community radio capacity building, training and skills organization. The concept behind this initiative is to inform, educate and reassure the community. They exploit the strengths and networks of the stations, creating information-based communication. These stations deal with a number of problems, such as late payment for rural job guarantee programmes, access to appropriate food and medication in remote areas, and information about health care facilities that receive patients with concerns other than Covid-19.A small community radio station in Dharamsala called Radio Gunjan, which is barely two years old, broadcasts in

Hindi and Pahari and Garhwali dialects. They translate some of the contents related to sanitation, public health and the measures to local dialects for their illiterate listeners.

The tribal areas of the country are still backward and underdeveloped. Communities media help reach these tribal communities in a way that is understandable and appropriate to them, as they have been neglected by the growth of their urban neighbors. Radio Dhimsa in Orissa, a station in Koraput, has been doing some incredible work not only on the air, but also physically, by entering the community. They're doing this at great risk to their own workers, trying to get there and spread knowledge, showing stuff like washing hands, wearing masks, and so on. Any of these items are better when performing them directly rather than in the air.

Community radio stations provided a description of the Coronavirus-related jargon, as many locals misinterpreted the words widely used which contributed to fear. People didn't know what quarantine meant, or what it was like to treat this virus. As a result, locals were told about 'quarantine' and 'social distancing,' especially in the fake news programme, along with brief interviews with recovered patients to shed light on the recovery process itself.

India faced a plethora of issues in addition to the pandemic. Misinformation was one of the lesser evils that thrived in this pandemic. The country witnessed a surge in Domestic violence cases and religious tensions as a direct result of this pandemic but the local media has done a commendable job in tackling these issues at their community levels. Many community outlets like Radio Mewat itself started a helpline to lend support and advise to the victims of Domestic Violence. Online communities came out in support of the victims through dedicated groups on popular social media platforms.

When the Government of India (GOI) declared a sudden 'lockdown' in March to curb the spread of the pandemic, informal migrant workers who travels miles away from their villages for work, were mired in a survival crisis, through loss of jobs, hunger, misery and persecution by the police and fearful communities maintaining 'social distance'. Absence of journalists on the ground and the devil may care attitude of the national media contributed to the utter ignorance of this crisis. This is when local and citizen journalism came to the vanguard of these hapless migrant labors. These community media outlets contributed to the function of accessing information about the services started by the Government. When the authorities started to register special trains intended to bring these employees to their homes, these uneducated and disadvantaged workers had little access to the Internet to register themselves. Local community stations enabled these workers to register and made sure that they had no access to the Internet.

'Gurgaon kiAwaaz' a community radio station from Gurgaon ensured that these poor laborers are not left to die. From informing these migrants about the timing of food delivery vans, their schedule and venue, to directing them about restrictions on movement and quarantine status in different parts of the district, and even advising them on how to cope with food and money shortages, where to get support from and how to overcome anxiety, the station succeeded as a hyper local communication system in this time of crisis.

Radio Namaskar, in Konark, Odisha helped the returning migrant workers in the strict

enforcement of the quarantine and lockdown. Radio Hirakh and, Odisha, set up a helpline service and linked 60-70 migrant workers to the District Magistrate's Office in the face of a food scarcity crisis. Radio Rathinavani, in collaboration with the Mithra Technology Foundation, pushed a cash collection campaign to support daily wage earners.

The countrywide lockdown creates several psychological issues for people locked inside for months. Having a forum to express their thoughts, and the storeys of living in the novel circumstances of a country-wide lockout, allowed people to feel connected, listened to, and most importantly, not alone in these circumstances. Various programmes, including 'Lockdown-e-Kotha' curated by NityanandaJanawani and 'Nazriya,' a programme developed by Waqt-Ki-Awaaz, Kanpur Dehat, based on locals and their storeys. The segments of these programmes also included discussions on common subjects selected by the listener. It was clear that people were taking to stay linked, as they were in pre-lock times, but in an unorthodox way.

Several community media groups, such as Rudi No Radio, also made live visits to their local communities and helped government institutions distribute food and coordinate consumer awareness sessions. Radio Muskan, Odisha, in association with collectors and other leaders, organized demonstrations of hand washing in local bus stands, auto stands and other public areas to raise local awareness. Radio Mann Deshi, Maharashtra conducted rounds in the larger cities of their Tehsil, demonstrating hand washing and wearing masks, along with precise announcements made by accompanying medical staff.

Community media organizations are doing what the big corporate media outlets avoided actively. At the cost of their own lives, reporters gathered news at ground and disseminated information to help protect their communities.

The local community is the first to respond to any disaster. Respondents in this case are Community media organization. They have been at the forefront of the battle against disinformation and are the most reliable intermediaries. Given that their reporters are not just voices but identifiable faces from within the city, they are trusted – as locals believe they will never do something that will hurt their fellow citizens.

Local radio stations, along with numerous stakeholders and locals, have worked hard to maintain the spirits of their communities and the nation at large, by radio and also by non-radio means. The spirit around the country was that, together the communities will successfully face the pandemic with the right tools and solutions.

PIB has been working to fight false news and misinformation. Vigyan Prasar has given more than 100 lectures in Tamil to AriviyalPalagai by experts working with the Tamil Nadu Science and Technology Centre. This was meant to get the right facts to the public at a time when new rumors and unverified information were being disseminated.

The Urdu newspaper Roshni, Jammu and Kashmir, has garnered widespread appreciation and recognition for putting a free facemask on the first page of its Tuesday edition and urged people to use it in the background of COVID-19. 'Roshni' means 'bright' and true to its name, the newspaper has paved the way for the rest by bringing social responsibility to a different

level. Priced at two ropes, the readers were definitely shocked by its revolutionary concept and the text that reads, "mask ka istemal zaroori hai" (using a mask is important). The subtext also said, "With this, not only you, but those around you can also remain protected from coronavirus."

The Tata Trusts have reached 1,2 million rural households across 21 states through a 12-day awareness-raising campaign on COVID-19. There are 6 main messages established through consultation with health experts that they share in collaboration with local organizations. These include simple messages on hand washing social distances, following respiratory etiquette, relying on the right source of information, early identification of COVID-19, as well as self-quarantine protocols for returning migrant workers.

Rajasthan Patrika, a local newspaper, gives ample room to the variety of questions asked by the people about Covid-19. In addition, the newspaper reported the answers to these questions from famous physicians. Special pages have been released to alert people to Coronavirus. In addition to the front page, Coronavirus-related news is often reported prominently on ever page.

The Center for Science and Environment, Lucknow has given support to the authorities for the implementation of best management practices in the City Sanitation with an emphasis on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management in the context of Covid-19.Since the COVID-19 lockdown, the CSE team has been committed to providing support to the authorities in the battle against COVID-19 by supporting the production of IEC collateral, ensuring that the Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) services are provided without hindrances. CSE has also provided personal protective equipment to sanitation staff. An awareness-programme was also launched to raise awareness. Their COVID Awareness Initiative had a dual objective: Sensitization and recruitment of sanitation workers; and COVID-19 Understanding and behavioral reform of the general population with an emphasis on low-income settlement

The Gok Direct Kerala app is a joint venture between the Government of Kerala and Qkopi (a local social communication platform). The app is available in multiple languages—English, Hindi, Malayalam and Bengali. The app is designed to raise awareness and disseminate reliable information relevant to COVID-19. Provides users with access to valuable knowledge such as quarantine protocols,
Guidelines for travel and general safety tips. App settings provide users with the facility to allow WHO notifications as well.

The Telangana Government is introducing the T-COVID'19 app. It is jointly developed by Cisco, AWS and Quantella. The app offers live updates on 19 cases of COVID in the state. It offers links to COVID-19 government and WHO advisories. Information on government-approved laboratories and research centers, government and private hospital isolation centers and state-owned quarantine centers are also available on the app. The app helps users with self-assessment of COVID-19 and also offers a telemedicine forum to contact a doctor.

MCOVID-19 is an initiative of the Mizoram Government. It is a mobile-based application to provide authentic information and notifications relevant to COVID-19. The app offers local, national and foreign updates in Mizo. The software also helps to track COVID-19 offenders in quarantine. It also offers access to government advisory services, task force registration, voluntary registration, and mPASS (a pass to permit the movement of goods, vehicles and people).

The Leprosy Mission Trust India (TLMTI) launched a 4-week COVID-19 Relief and Awareness Campaign-#Virus Pe Vijay. TLMTI has used different platforms at all stages, from conventional to digital media. Through this project, TLMTI aimed at transmitting the messages of this campaign to the target communities and encouraging them to join the battle to defeat the spread of the virus. In addition, as part of the campaign, TLMTI, in close collaboration with state governments and the district administration, provided relief work by providing food and sanitation to thousands of people across the region.

Assam Government has launched a huge drive across the state to spread awareness of the coronavirus. The "JonoJagaron" campaign has been launched in every district with a special emphasis on vulnerable sections, including the aged, people with co-morbidities, children under the age of 10, and pregnant women. The state government engaged religious leaders and institutions to campaign to ensure that it reaches the masses. Awareness campaign also sought to reach out to the community that might have been ignored previously, with focus on ramping up voluntary 'testing' and adherence to the COVID-19 protocol. Awareness efforts were expanded from distributing leaflets to making the public aware of the measures to be taken. Village-level health cares, like ASHA staff, have played an important role in the programme.

Magic Bus Youth Mentors have begun their awareness campaigns by visiting communities to make them aware of the #COVID19outbreak, the need to remain indoors, wash their hands, keep them sanitized and stop touching their faces during the day. They also explained why it was necessary to avoid social gatherings. They spread that it is very important to seek early medical attention if one develops fever, cough, or trouble breathing. Mentors have sensitized residents about signs and disease prevention when listening to their questions. Youth mentors assured citizens that there is no need to fear in this regard, and the government has worked extensively to monitor it.

Kerala Kaumudi, one of the leading newspapers in the Kerela that publishes in the regional language Malayalam, has been trying to raise public awareness through campaigns. One of the reasons behind the prevalent spread of the virus was a lack of understanding regarding the use of masks, the paper decided to organize a mask awareness drive. The newspaper was released with a jacket cover titled 'IthuEnteKaruthal (This is my protection)' featuring portrait images of influential people from different fields wearing masks including included Kerala governor Arif Mohammad Khan, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Health Minister K K Shailaja, other political leaders, bureaucrats and prominent personalities from politics, arts, literature, sports, business and movies. The campaign captured people's attention and was widely spread through social media in the coming days.

Amul is India's fastest-growing dairy organization and the ninth largest in the world. The brand is well known for its current and regional brand promotions, in particular by using Hinglish to reach out to customers. In order to encourage social distancing, their cartoon comics were appropriate, witty and imaginative, thus talking about 'flattening the curve,' 'following Namaste tradition,' glorifying 'applause observed across the country' and 'thanking the doctors' by making a reference to the 2003 Bollywood blockbuster movie Munna bhai MBBS, starring leading actors such as Sanjay Dutt, who is a sensation among the people. Munna bhai MBBS is one of the main picks in Bollywood comedy movies, and its dialogues are youth-favored and mostly used in memes.

Harvest Gold is India's leading bread maker. Their Hinglish tagline 'Ek Desh, Ek Subah, Ek Sabki Bread' (One Country, One Morning, One Popular Bread) is an example of an embracing marketing place. Not only in the tagline, but in their brand contact, local languages such as Hindi and Hinglish have been used. During COVID-19, Harvest Gold used a mix of creative on their Instagram handle to encourage social distancing with the campaign name 'Dooriyan Hain Zaroori' (again using Hindi, literally translating 'Distances are Necessary'). Initially, they released a collection of toasted bread with a text encouraging social distancing and the hashtag movement. Their second part of the campaign included creators referring to the 1975 Bollywood classic Sholay, which became the biggest Bollywood film of that year, and the first film in India to celebrate the Silver Jubilee at more than 100 theatres. With Indian stars of the period such as Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, Hema Malini, and Jaya Bhaduri, Sholay is still a classic film with memorable dialogues used in the innovative campaign to resonate with the audience.

Excel Entertainment is an Indian production and distribution company. They used one of the posters from their own production, Gully Boy (2019), a multi award-winning film that was earned more than $37 million worldwide. The phenomenon among the country's youth and the game-changer for the street rappers of India, choosing Gully Boy to spread awareness during the pandemic, was a wise decision. On their Instagram account, they posted a carousel of Gully Boy's leading stars, Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, who are Bollywood's talented young generation actors.

Vadilal Ice Creams reached out via their Instagram to encourage social distancing by keeping up to date and taking notes from Ramayana, one of the two main Sanskrit epics of ancient India. The 1987-launched Indian TV series Ramayana, which was a visual depiction of this ancient script, was re-released on television during the COVID-19 lockdown. To remain important and communicate with their consumers, Vadilal cleverly encouraged social distancing by mentioning 'Lakshman Rekha,' an anecdote of the epic. Lakshman Rekha is a strong connotation among the Indians and is commonly used in conversation to 'not cross the line.' Lakshman Rekha, in background, is a line drawn by Lakshmana, an avatar of the Hindu God Vishnu, around the hut he shared with his elder brother Lord Rama and Rama's wife Sita during their exile. Before he goes out to find Lord Rama, Lakshman draws a line around their house to protect Sita as he asks her not to cross that line, known as the 'Lakshman Rekha.'

HURDLES FACED BY COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA

The Supreme Court of India in 1995 declared in a landmark judgment for The Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting v Cricket Association of Bengal that 'airwaves constitute public property and must be used for the advancement of the public good. Consequently, the government began issuing licenses to commercial operators in 1999. The Indian government took a different approach to the SC decision, interpreting it as the DE monopolization of airwaves in the favor of private sector operators and thus sale of FM frequencies to private bidders started. In 2003, the Government of India authorized 'existing educational institutions' to apply for a license to broadcast on a limited-power FM frequency. It took three years after the initial announcement was made that the government would give the right to community-based organizations that were no longer viewed as a threat to the protection and sovereignty' of the country.

The struggle for free and democratic radio space started with the Pastapur Initiative, 2000 which was passed by civil society leaders, community media practitioners and scholars to demand creation community radios' in India. The cornerstones of this demand were universal access, diversity, fair distribution of wealth and the empowerment of traditionally marginalized groups of society. They emphasized that 'priority in the issuance of broadcast licenses should be given to the communities of rural and other least developed regions. Then in October 2008 the first community run radio station in the country, Sangam Radio went on air.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in 2013 mandated that community radio stations would not be permitted to broadcast news, but can only rebroadcast the AIR bulletin. This was subsequently clarified by the 2017 notification to that effect. Subsequently, there was a government mandate for electronic media Monitoring Center (EMMC) to monitor the content on private and community radio networks. This was also accompanied by a government notification that required the current committees responsible for monitoring content on television to monitor content on these channels.

In 2013, Common Cause filed a Public Interest Lawsuit (PIL) in the Supreme Court for the quashing of clauses in the policy guidelines restricting the transmission of news and current affairs material on FM and community radio stations. There were two broad grounds on which they challenged the above-mentioned policy restrictions. First, they argued that the provisions of the Policy Guidelines and the GoPA that prohibit such broadcasting were in violation of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which requires, within its scope, the right to obtain various interpretations of news, current affairs and other sources of information. Second, they argued that these policy rules were arbitrary and biased in nature since no such limitations were imposed on TV channels and on print media that broadcast news. They argued that in the light of such arbitrary discrimination, these policy directives were also contrary to the right to equality before law and equal protection of law under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. The petition argued that India may be the only democratic country in the world where private actors are prohibited from broadcasting news or cultural affairs. Common Cause argued that this strategy of favoring Prasar Bharti over other players and legitimizing only AIR news over other outlets is undemocratic. This petition was dismissed on technicalities in 2019.

The government's regulatory response to the criticism has been to allow these channels to transmit AIR news verbatim. Yet, as the facts show, AIR broadcasts in 20-30 major languages

through only 47 stations across the country. The AIR cannot compete with community radio stations for a variety of reasons. First, community radio stations can curate content that is immediately important to the community. For rural communities, these radio stations may broadcast information on local developments and policies that may have more effect on them than national government schemes. Second, local community networks are important because they can circulate information in the local dialect(s), which can often change even in small clusters of villages.

These government regulations have a disproportionate effect on specific populations. As the TRAI Consultation Paper pointed out in 2008, the acquisition of news from newspapers and television channels involves a certain degree of literacy. Thus, for an illiterate and socio-economically deprived citizenry, community radio news may be the only viable source of news. These societies are forced to rely on a single, centralized and controlled broadcast, which may carry meaningless content in an incomprehensible language.

With the decreased costs of smartphones and Internet connectivity, a variety of populations are being linked to new sources of information. Although the digital empowerment of communities is commendable and important, its unintended effects need to be addressed through local initiatives. Disinformation strategies and the dissemination of disinformation are often effective due to a lack of awareness of how to trust news outlets. Thus, freeing community radio outlets to broadcast news will go a long way to fighting Internet disinformation by providing opportunities in a local sense. Locally recognized faces, providing an integrated form of transparency, will also operate community radio stations catering to rural areas.

CONCLUSION

In globalized media with context and space for media conglomerates, both Community and media are interdependent and inseparable from each other. In certain instances, community affects the media, and vice versa. Either of these two is going to get built with the influence of another. The task of the group is to make sense of democratizing media content, leading to a free flow of information. On the other hand, the media should pay scant attention to the problems and prospects of the society in the age of the political economy of the media and its shifting modus operandi.

The burden lies with the community and the media to make community media successful. The role of the community is immense to make the community media a success on a number of fronts. In the other hand, media should comply with ideal standards for the creation, delivery and consumption of content. Contents should be egalitarian, inclusive and progressive in concept, execution and evaluation. The position and duty of the government and the media should go hand in hand to make it more successful in a sustainable manner. In one way, the community should provide feedback to the media, and in another way, the media should mature the community. Some of the community media, such as traditional media, are being undermined and therefore strict steps should be taken on the basis of fighting. Community-type media should set out their tasks in order to achieve the socio-economic advancement of society in general and of the community in particular.

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