

Role of Media for Boosting the Morale of Audience during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Mass media is considered as a powerful force on shaping and presenting the world to the masses. The role of media in the times of crisis and how effectively public health communication is carried out by media is also studied here. The study brings out the relevance of media analysis during the time of pandemic and its effectiveness in communicating the information on pandemic to the masses. The study also aims to understand the role of opinion leader done by media during pandemic using survey method with structured questionnaire. The study has clearly shown justice to find out the role of media in promoting unity in pandemic times and also monitored media role of dissemination of true information to the masses. The study also focussed on effectiveness of crisis management by media during pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic, morale, visual media

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19-The pandemic and media role

The outbreak of a virus named COVID-19 in Wuhan, China is leading to a global crisis which is severely reflected almost all the countries very badly. In this time period, in spite of the physical, social threats and distancing, the tremendous role of different mass media in the lives of all individual, social and mass group level. The situations of health crises like COVID-19 are global in their nature, scope and potential impacts, and appear to have increased in frequency and intensity over the last decade (Cottle, 2009; Guha-sapir, Hargitt, & Hoyois, 2004). We have seen a large number of epidemics in the past few years.

People around the globe depends largely on news media as it plays an essential role in bringing publicity and share concerns and safety measures for the masses. People can perceive health crises through news coverage, given that news frames lead to various interpretations of health crises by highlighting certain features, but overlooking other features (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Media holds a very dynamic role of delivering health and risk information on epidemics or pandemic by detailed examination on various issues, frames, sources, attributes where audience gratification will be mainly based the level and impact of news received.

During this time it is widely accepted that mass media despite involving in in-depth research and easy technological

transformation has done a wonderful role of dissemination of news on pandemic, stabilising the mental power or boosting the morale of audience through various methods.

Agenda setting theory

This study tries to prove the objectives through mentioning the role of priming and framing of media in Agenda setting theory. The main cognitive media effects including priming and framing occupy a prominent role on media analysis especially in the case of political communication. Various scholars of mass media had suggested that the field passed through series of paradigms in 20 th century (McQuail, 2005). This study also analyse the media effect on the mental wellbeing of audience making them able to face the pandemic fearlessly.

Agenda-setting, in the parlance of Walter Lippmann, refers to the basic correspondence between media coverage of "the world outside" and "the pictures in our heads." Agenda-setting was born of an atomistic society in which individuals turned to the mass media to define social reality; agenda-setting effects are moderated by one's need for orientation (Weaver, 1977).

Introduced to the study of political communication by Iyengar and his colleagues (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), media-priming theory has its origins in psychological

network models of memory. Regarding framing it deals with the content of news. Frame-setting describes how public perceptions of what is applicable to explaining a problem are influenced by how the media frame that problem (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). In the study there is an intensive attempt to find out the framing and priming of media regarding the news reporting style during pandemic

The relevance of two step flow theory where opinion leaders are formed while disseminating news can't be neglected here. Journalists to a certain level play the role of opinion leaders for the audience while information is transmitted from sender to receiver. There is an active participation of audience after been exposed to media

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Elisa Pieri (2018) in the research article, '*Media Framing and the Threat of Global Pandemics: The Ebola Crisis in UK Media and Policy Response*' clearly states that impact of British Newspaper in framing of Ebola and the role it played in shaping a problem by questioning the political base there. The article tries to bring out a comparative angle of different issues being portrayed by the newspaper especially sociological angle and it clearly says the media restricted the chance of an open debate among audience for the pandemic measures which finally made an imbalance in the development scale of UK.

Brooke FisherLiu, Sora Kim(2011) in the article, "*How organisations framed 2009 H1N1 Pandemic through traditional and social media: Implications to US health Communicators*" said that there were enormous organisations which framed pandemic as a crisis. Social media was liberally used as equal to traditional media in framing the pandemic for the public audience. The findings in the study indicated a lack of coalition between social and traditional media where surprisingly it was found out organisations relied on traditional for framing their own ideas through social media. It also shows that public was emotionally supported by these media.

B. Duncan(2009)in the study, *How the media reported the first days of the pandemic (H1N1) 2009: results of EU-wide media analysis* clearly made the analysis that the media has done a tremendous work of main source of information effectively. There were more than 4000 articles published in a limited time period which really helped the public for morale boosting during crisis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Pilot Study

Pre-test was administered among 20 sample size and few survey experts and journalists to understand the clarity and structure of questionnaire in detail.

Minor changes were made as told by them and extensive proof reading was made after examining review of literature repeatedly. Almost 35 items were included in the questionnaire to arrive in proper scale measurement. There were more than six potential dimensions selected for the study. The study focused on several objectives.

- To analyse the role of media in creating a sense of unity reaching large audience.

- To find out whether media tries to create misinformation, discrimination among people during pandemic
- To study the effectiveness of media role in increasing public adherence to safety measures given by WHO
- To understand the impact of media in bringing adaptive measures to foster positive mental attitudes among public
- To study the role of media in the private domain (family) of the audience.
- To suggest remedial measures for better media involvement in crisis management.

Quantitative survey through structured questionnaire is being administered as the primary data collection method. Simple random sampling was used to conduct a high quality survey on the audience response whether journalists are acting as a watch dog for the society.

The development of list of audience aware of the pandemic through all types of media was highly challenging due to many reasons. During lockdown people were not that cooperative in giving their opinion impartially and the lack of interest shown was also seen. As a result the sampling frame creation involved various steps

Firstly we depended on working professionals as sample size and later the addition of house wives, retired employees, and college going students all who falls in the category of 20-65 years. Questionnaire was administered to these groups and was given one week time for giving their responses. Google form with the list of questions from three point scale to five point scale (likert scale) was used in the study.

Secondary data collection was also carried out simultaneously by observing the social media campaigns and other media materials. The sample size selected for the study was 150 which were broadly divided into four categories of samples.

In the study journalists of major news channels including India today, ABP news, Republic, ABP Majha and News Nation are taken for their role both during news presentation and reporting.

There were 50 professionals, 50 retired crowd and 50 college graduate level students chosen in an around Mumbai city which was selected zone wise. There was a proper ratio of male and female which falls in the above categories maintained in the study.

Qualitative research

Despite of intensive literature review, the researcher tired to identify other valuable inputs and inferences in order to strengthen the study. The survey was conducted with the said samples and simultaneously interview of 05 journalists was conducted for supporting the primary data collection method. The analysis of the interview material was done using highly qualitative method of coding the answers connecting with the objectives. Respondents were cooperating with diverse interesting opinions.

The respondents were asked structured questions which were kept in different dimensions to derive the valid opinions. Relevant questions including the ones which assess

the impact of media campaigns, which increased the morale of audience, the time period of campaigns and catchy phrases used by journalists at throughout the story was also included.

Expert feedback

To undergo in-depth study inferences, the materials were scrutinized by an expert team of five mass media teachers and 02 research scholars in journalism. The team clearly validated the content from literature review to data collection method. Pilot study was fully approved by the

team which gave the researcher the confidence to move ahead.

Scale development procedures

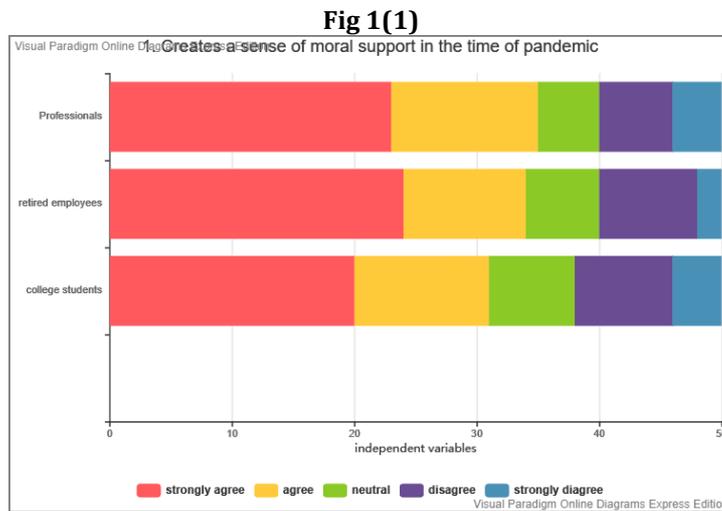
The study really focussed on nominal scale of measurement which even comes under non parametric hypothesis testing. The study didn't posses hypothesis but was strictly dealing with the objectives been taken into account for better clarity. The study has used simple percentage analysis to analyse the data in detail.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Media creates a sense of moral support in the time of pandemic.

In the study it was highly clear that the respondents in the three groups of professionals, retired employees and college students who stood for the above statement constituted more than 75% in the overall sample size. Only 25 % constituted for disagreeing the statement.

Professionals (40%) stood more than other respondents saying media helped them to create a moral support during pandemic. This clearly shows youth are also dependent on media for news and more during crisis.



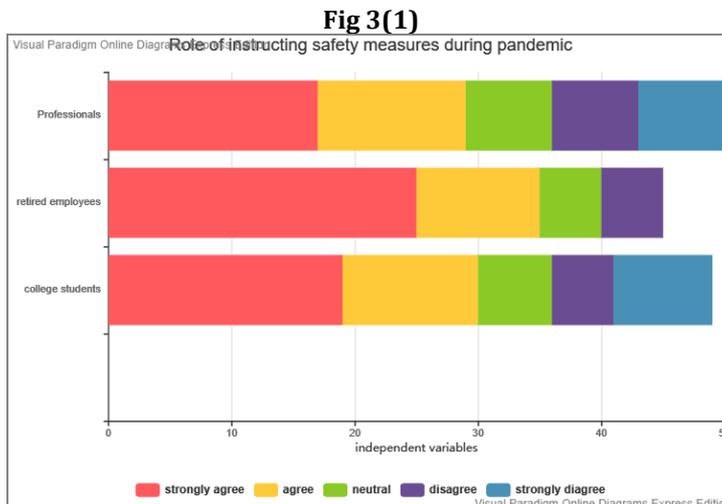
2. The impulsiveness due to pandemic fear and anxiety is lessened by the role of a journalist

During the study period it was clearly understood that there existed a clear panic and anxiety among people about the pandemic consequences. It was clearly seen when the response came as 74% agreed to the statement very quickly. Only a small minority was left for disapproval Professionals (38%) are the group which strongly agreed than others on the above statement.

3. Media personals play the role of counsellor or healer with their words during pandemic.

When coming to some characteristic of psychological support provided by media during pandemic, more than 73.3% respondents supported that media had done their role of a watchdog and supporter for audiences.

College going students (39%) were the group who strongly stood that media played the role as counsellor and healer for them thereby increasing the morale of people.



4. The journalists gives proper instructions for precautionary measures in case of physical hygiene and also mental strength

Regarding dissemination of information on pandemic, the media also had a role of asking the audience or even instructed them for the precautionary measures like social distancing, regular hand wash, stay indoors and even asking audience for going mind detoxification like hearing music, qualitative spending time with family, and go for virtual psychological closeness with friends. Respondents agreed the statement by constituting (74.6%) of the total sample size. Professionals (47%) are more than other respondents for agreeing the statement

5. The journalists try to educate the audience with detail in-depth reports and analytical studies about the pandemic
News presentation and other detailed in-depth reports on pandemic status, precautions for people, public experience sharing after been cured from COVID-19 were telecasted for creating knowledge and also make them well informed on the pros and cons of the pandemic. In this study it was visible that

Respondents (72%) stood for the statement in which Retired employees (39%) are more in number. This clearly shows that the credibility of news in any media holds a major position in the minds of audience.

6. There is a sense of oneness created when the media pacifies everyone during pandemic and comforts the audience with safety measures and mental support

Media was offering slogans or campaigns at the end of story reporting which clearly brings the concept of humanity as one. There was a secular feel in the words of media where the social demarcations were seen nowhere. Audience started waiting for the slogan like "*We will overcome this as standing one*" for a moral support during crisis.

In the study it was found that respondents (74.6%) agreed the statement and even Professionals (39%) were more in number than other respondents comparing with rest sample size.

7. There is a clear agenda setting done by media to increase their TRP or readership through this public consoling in different ways.

This statement was the only one which was used in a negative sense just to know whether public is aware of the behind the screen activities in media or still they strongly believes media plays well positively during pandemic. But the response was really embarrassing that people are educated on media policy and ownership patterns.

Respondents (23%) said media wants to increase TRP along with handling crisis and rest 77% stood against the statement

8. Journalists become opinion leaders sometimes for initiating an action in the audience's life

Respondents had the opinion that media acts as an opinion leader in their life many times but during this crisis it was found more. Regarding the crisis times, the respondents depended on media completely to be informed and to take crucial decisions to avoid panic buying. They even considered media as an influencer to take decisions. When this question was asked more than 66% agreed with the statement and in that college students (35%) were more in number. Youngsters make media as an opinion leader than all other group of respondents.

9. There is a feeling of affinity and closeness towards journalists than the role of mere information dissemination

This statement is closely related with the previous statement where the mental closeness with audience and media personalities. Same here, as the extension of previous statement, the respondents (75%) opined that a closeness with journalists as a fellow beings and in this retired employees(38%)occupied the major position.

10. Audience are more psychologically dependent on the media during pandemic than normal times

Psychological dependency of audience on media is found more during pandemic than normal times. This may be because of the mental trauma faced during crisis and tried and found media as a place for relaxation. In the study (70%) respondents agreed this statement where retired employees opined more may be the dependency they have on media will be more than the other two respondents.

11. News consumption has increased drastically during pandemic

Dependency of media for news in which visual media dependency for live news presentation is seen more among respondents in larger scale was observed throughout the study. It was found that respondents (65%) said yes for the statement. College students (40%) and retired employees (39%) were more in agreeing the statement.

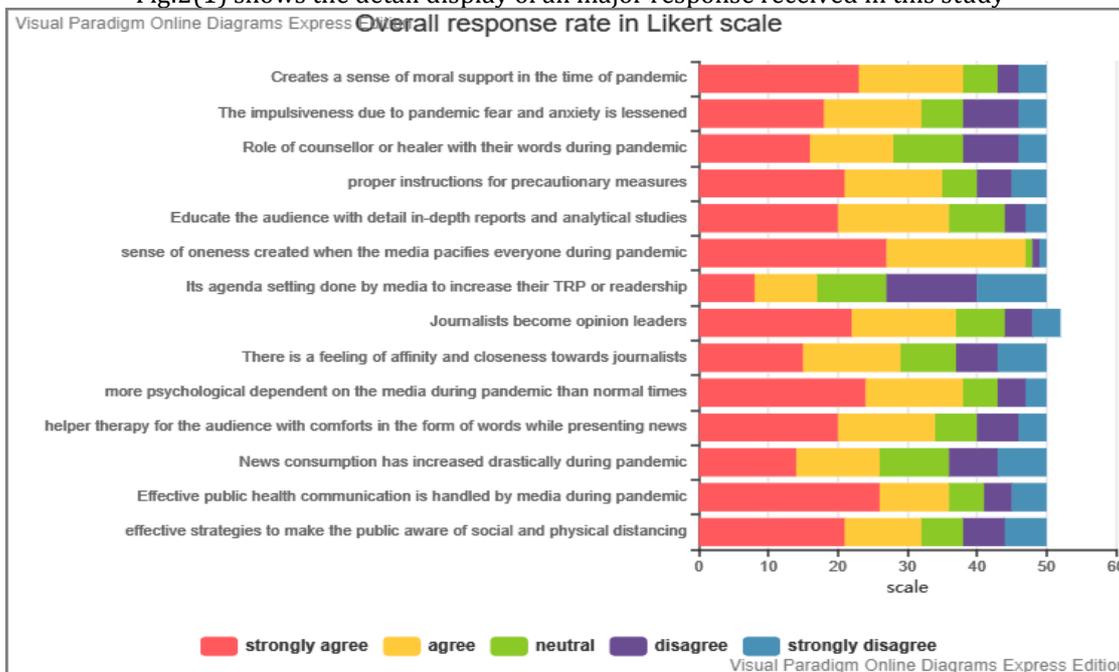
12. Effective public health communication is handled by media during pandemic

Respondents were highly clear that public health communication was handled by visual media effectively. More than 71.3% respondents agreed for the statement and in that professional group (37%) stood more for the response

13. Media provides effective strategies to make the public aware of social and physical distancing.

Apart from the news presentation their came an array of social advertisements improving the morale of people both locally and nationally. Advertisements which can act as an effective strategy or campaign really helped people relevant with upbringing slogans to withstand crisis.70% respondents agreed that the physical distancing and its necessities for the family as well as nation was handled by media.

Fig:2(1) shows the detail display of all major response received in this study



Below table Fig 2(2) gives a detailed view of the sample size differently and the response rate in numbers for better understanding

Variables	Responses															Total
	Strongly agree			agree			neutral			disagree			Strongly disagree			
	P	R	C	P	R	C	P	R	C	P	R	C	P	R	C	
Media creates a sense of moral support in the time of pandemic	25	20	22	15	13	16	5	07	6	5	5	3	0	5	3	150
The impulsiveness due to pandemic fear and anxiety is lessened by the role of a journalist	23	22	21	14	13	17	5	04	4	03	05	04	04	06	04	150
Media personals play the role of counsellor or healer with their words during pandemic	22	21	23	14	15	15	7	05	6	4	04	3	03	05	3	150
The journalists gives proper instructions for precautionary measures in case of physical hygiene and also mental strength	27	21	20	16	13	15	3	07	6	2	04	4	2	04	5	150
The journalists try to educate the audience with detail in-depth reports and analytical studies about the pandemic	20	24	23	14	15	12	7	8	7	5	02	4	4	1	4	150
There is a sense of oneness created when the media pacifies everyone during pandemic and comforts the audience with safety measures	26	23	20	13	17	13	8	7	8	2	2	5	1	1	4	150
There is a clear agenda setting done by media to increase their TRP or readership through this public consoling in different ways.	4	6	5	5	7	8	5	10	11	13	11	10	23	16	16	150
Journalists become opinion leaders sometimes for initiating an action in the audience's life	16	15	21	15	17	14	12	10	8	4	4	3	3	4	4	150
There is a feeling of affinity and closeness towards journalists than the role of mere information dissemination	22	17	17	15	21	20	10	6	7	2	3	4	1	3	2	150
Media acts as a helper therapy for the audience with comforts in the form of words while presenting news	21	19	20	15	14	13	8	7	7	4	5	5	2	5	5	150
Effective public health communication is handled by media during pandemic	22	20	21	15	15	14	7	6	5	5	5	6	1	4	4	150

P=Professionals, R=Retired employees, C=College students

CONCLUSION

Finally taking a look at how professionals, retired employees and college rendered their responses on media and its role during COVID-19, here are the major conclusions the researcher was able to draw in depth from the study.

Visual media was a main source of information on COVID-19 and news consumption came to a drastically huge numbers comparing other months. During pandemic times visual media has become an inseparable part of the life of respondents and

majority agreed that this goes spiking until the pandemic subsides. Even the relevance of asking misinformation been spread during pandemic, majority said visual media had the least level of misinformation in reports. Social media occupied the major role for disturbing and misinformation to audience during pandemic.

In a social science approach the only suggestion that can be given for avoiding misinformation is be the master and try to differentiate what is trustworthy and what is not by cross verifying news source very well

Media has a tremendous influence on public response to the pandemic

According to the respondents, the major safety, precautionary measures during pandemic was communicated effectively through visual media in which even journalists devote time while reporting for reminding people on health care and precaution like social distancing, home quarantine.

It was highly noted that ideas for precaution and safety measures were highly and effectively done by media people like *please do stay home stay safe* received high applause.

The concept of panic buying was minimised due to the interference of visual media.

When the national lockdown was announced by the Prime Minister on 21 March 2020, there was a sudden panic being created among public whether they will be facing the dearth of essential goods and that created complete chaos in front of grocery shops.

Media played a role of a catalyst by informing the government assurance of no scarcity for goods where the media professionals even became opinion leaders for the audience

Media provided a best platform for social responsible product marketing

Besides the social responsibility angle, there was also the emergence of a term called social responsible product marketing been done efficiently done by media. The respondents group of college going students had opined mostly on this comment.

Public health campaigns of media have informed the audience intensively.

It shows that a series of health campaigns with the slogans on staying safe at home, social distancing became popular due to the repeated awareness created by journalists in between reporting stories.

Media tried to communicate more "good news" on pandemic than the bad news style

The cliché idea of bad news catches more audience was changed to an extend under this situation. Media was keener on highlighting good news which is healthy and which supports the audience mental health with stories of psycho experts giving them high motivation on how to overcome the pandemic and even media created a platform for the audience to share their concerns with medical experts

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Separate details of the diagrams and tables mentioned in the study

Fig 1(1)

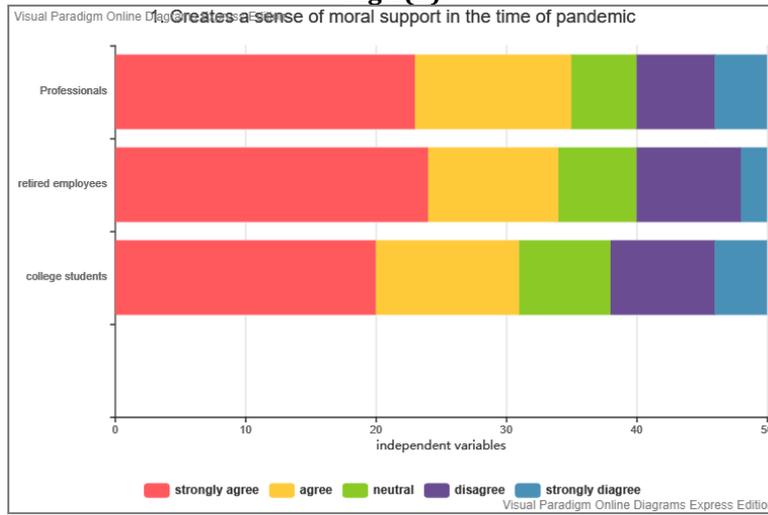


Fig 3(1)

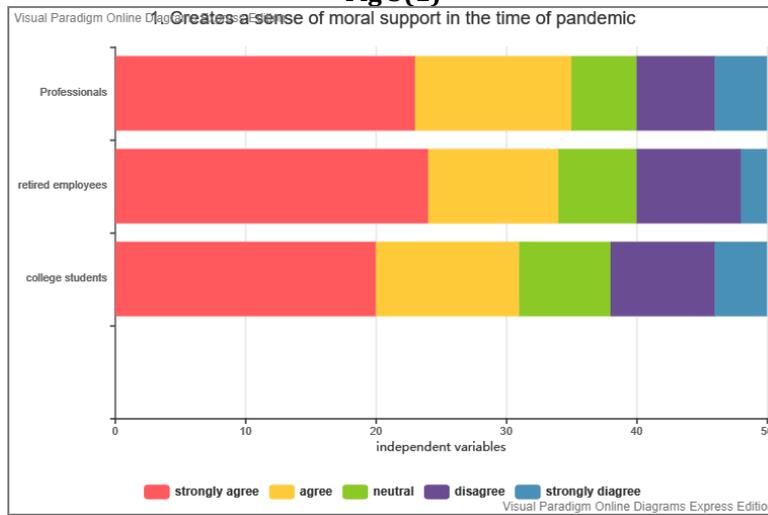


Fig 2(1)

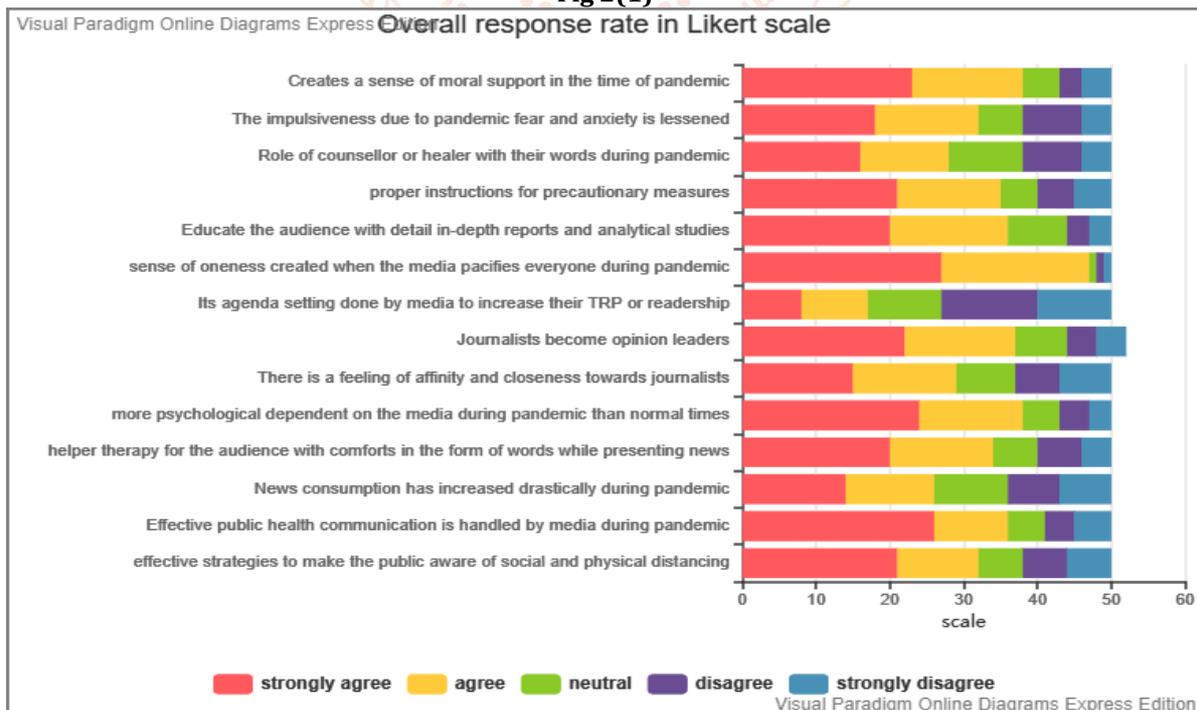


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