



A Study on the Use and Effectiveness of Twitter in the Management of Covid-19-related Communication in Four Districts of Uttar Pradesh, India

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Abstract: Social media has played a very prominent role in the communication, during Covid 19 in the entire world. It has served the purpose of quick and fast dissemination of message, by working as message multiplier. Use of social media has been of huge advantages in disseminating and managing Covid-19 communication, originating from official sources, but it also had some disadvantages, which led to coining of terms such as Infodemic.

This paper aims to study the use of Twitter platform in India, in a micro environment of a fairly decentralised unit of administration, called as district administration. During the lockdown period Twitter was used to communicate and engage with the general public by the authorities. This paper examines the effectiveness of social media as a communication tool during the lockdown period.

Keywords- Social Media Engagement, Twitter Usage, Local Administration.

Introduction

Lockdown during the outbreak of Covid-19 in India has promoted the use of social media for communicating and managing health related communication and health information seeking by the patients which led to many positive outcomes but sometimes resulted in miscommunication as well leading to coining of term Infodemic (Chowdhury, Archis (2020)). Local administration used the traditional ways of, Television and Radio as well as mobile phones to deliver, Covid 19 and lockdown related information. Twitter became an important communication tool, by the local authorities to share Covid 19 related updates and information as well as to listen to the grievances of general public, and addressing them during the Covid 19 as traditional ways of physically connecting was not possible during the lockdown period (Alrazaq 2020).

This paper aims to examine, four districts local administrations tweets for their engagement, with the public during the covid crisis. Social media has demonstrated its relevance, as a tool of connecting with general public as some of the administrators have used it effectively to share and address the concerns of general public, whereas others were not that proactive and engaging. This paper aims to study whether, this communication has affected the outcome of the Covid management as reflected, in number of Covid cases in these districts.

Literature Review

In today's world social media platforms are amongst the most widely used sources of information. The ease of use and relatively low cost of access and a large number of users in these platforms has made them as one of the most effective ways of disseminating information. In the case of any major events happening, usually greater search for information happens be it a disease, or a natural disaster



(Alrazaq 2020).

An analysis of google search trends in China in the weeks preceding the surge in COVID-19 cases vindicates the role that Internet and social media platforms in China played in information seeking about COVID-19. It can be clearly seen that Internet and social media networks searches have a demonstrated correlation with the incidence of disease (C.Li.2020).

In Indian context the use of internet and social media spiked during the Lockdown period due to the movement restriction placed by the lockdown. A popular statistical data collection website Statista conducted a survey and found that, from month of January to July 2020, the social media usage increased substantially. The results of the survey on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on media usage across India, it was found that there was a surge in usage of social networking websites and social media applications during the first phase of the nation-wide lockdown. This trend got stabilized in the subsequent weeks with individual users reporting an average 3 hours and 37 minutes on social media in the last week of June in the year 2020 (Statista website survey 2020).

Highlighting the importance of social media and other media platforms in the management of public health communication, World Health Organisation has stated in 2011 that the capacity to relay information quickly and clearly on different media platforms of both traditional mass media as well as new media is essential in the effective management of a public health emergency. (W.H.O 2011) World health organization has commissioned a study in 2020 to understand the social media behaviour of young adults during the pandemic. In this study it has been reported that 43.9% of respondents said that they would prefer to share “scientific” content on their social media. This fact helped in sharing public health messages during COVID-19 surge. (W.H.O 2021)

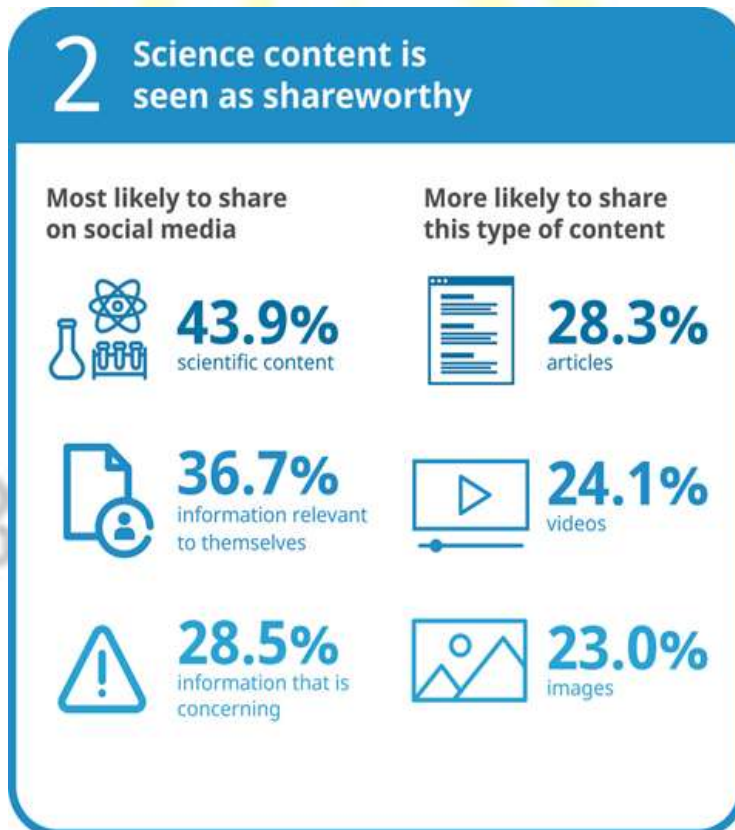


Table 1: A global study by W.H.O on digital information sharing by young adults and Millennials.



This surge in social media use for searching and sharing health related information has helped local administration in conveying Covid 19 related scientific messaging among general public, which has played an important role in managing the initial panic and crisis situation of the country.

Research Methodology

The study is conducted by collecting publicly available tweets of the district magistrates of four districts, which are taken by applying purposive sampling to get a fair comparison of tweets data of these administrative officers.

Four districts of comparative population from among the 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh are selected for the purpose of the study. Qualitative analysis of the tweets was done by using content analysis method to gather the data about the total number of tweets posted containing the terms related to Covid for the first lockdown period of the Covid 19 pandemic. All the tweets from the district magistrates of, these four districts for the period of, 24th, March,2020 to 12th February 2021 were compiled in a document. Then the data is transferred to MAXQDA software for qualitative analysis of the data. The data is searched for the use of words Corona, Covid 19, Covid, as most of the tweets concerning Covid 19 were done by using these words in the body of the tweets.

In all the interactions taking place with the general public these words were used by authorities to communicate about various communications concerning Covid 19 protocol. By counting the number of tweets containing these words, we can evaluate the interactivity, engagement and frequency for which authorities engaged with the public. Number of Covid cases in these districts were taken from the public data of government of India for total number of cases, and these data sets were analysed to understand the prevalence of disease in these four districts. A quantitative comparative analysis of four district is done to identify if any correlation exists, among these different data sets with the proactiveness of administrators on twitter, as they were primarily using social media to communicate during this period, which was then taken up by the social media and then other media forums at large.

Data Analysis

The Data Collected is processed on, MS Excel Software followed by, MAXQDA software and then final analysis is performed using the MS Excel Software. The following table shows the end results of obtained by processing the data. Two districts of comparable population are placed together, and the data is processed for the selected parameters. For counting the number of tweets containing Covid related terms all tweets for the period of analysis are copied using relevant software. The tweets are then exported to MAXQDA software, and analysed for the terms related to Covid 19.

A total of 1134 tweets were done by the, four district magistrates containing Covid 19 related terms combined. In these tweets the district magistrates of Kanpur and Barabanki were more proactive on social media, and they have done 407 and 561 tweets respectively. Lucknow and Varanasi administration were less active on twitter, with 71 and 93 tweets respectively from their account for the period of this study.



Name of the District	Population of the district in Million	Total No of Tweets Containing Covid Related Terms in it.	Total No of Covid Cases
Kanpur Nagar	5.307857 (India census website)	407	32947(MOHFW)
Lucknow	5.317786	71	81652
Varanasi	4.259988	93	23471
Barabanki	3.777846	561	7818

Table 3: Data of Select four districts for Analysis

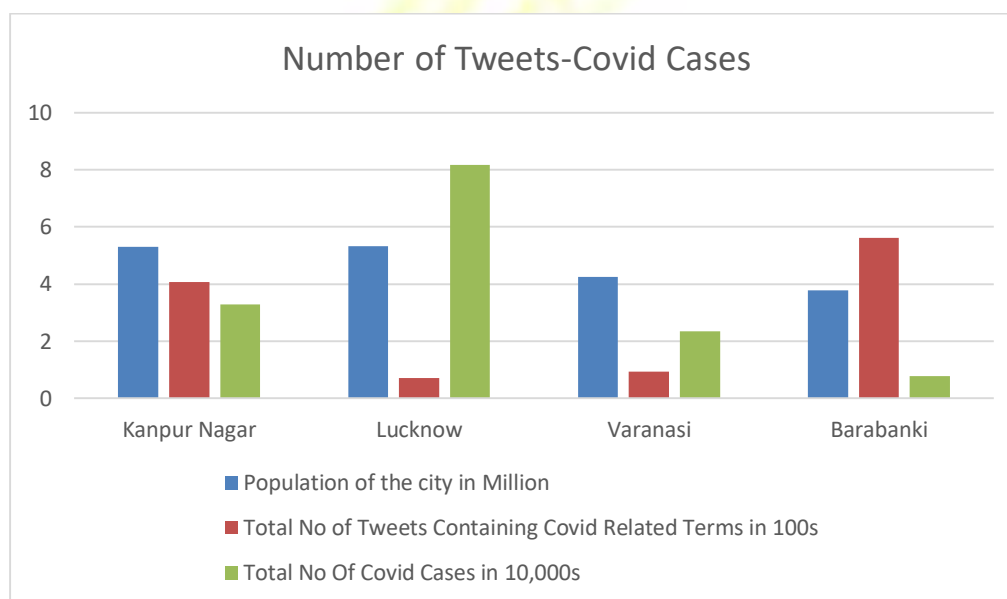


Table 4- Graphic representation of Population-Covid Cases-Number of Tweets data chart of select four districts of Uttar Pradesh

Results and Conclusion

During the lockdown period, the entire population of the country got confined within the home, and that prompted the mass media into action to communicate about this Novel Coronavirus Disease. Social media played a very important role in communicating about daily activities and information and to avoid panic during the time of this crisis. This study results also confirm that twitter use has affected, the outcome of the disease spread in various districts as twitter messages, from verified users are considered credible and authentic. These messages act as source message, for later posts on WhatsApp, Facebook etc thus amplifying the message to a great extent.

The Findings indicate that, there is an indirect correlation in the number of Covid cases reported in, these districts to the number of tweets, done by the district magistrates of these districts during the lockdown period, of first Covid Wave in India. Lucknow and Kanpur Nagar districts have



comparable population, but Kanpur reported significantly less cases, as compared to Lucknow and the district magistrate of Kanpur tweeted more, using Covid related terms. Barabanki and Varanasi districts have comparable population, but Barabanki reported significantly less cases, as compared to Varanasi and the district magistrate of Barabanki tweeted more, using Covid related terms. This indicates that, social media has certainly played important role, in communicating the covid related messages and, engaging with public, which resulted in significantly less cases in districts where local administration was more proactive and engaging on twitter social media platform.

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