

**Practice of Constructive Journalism During Corona-time: A Study on
Journalists Working for National Dailies in Rajshahi**

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Abstract

A novel pathogen emerged in December 2019 and within weeks, led to the emergence of the biggest global health crises seen to date. The virus was named 'COVID-19' by the World Health Organization (WHO). The virus and disease are commonly referred to as 'coronavirus' or 'novel coronavirus'. The world is facing the extensive spread of the virus. The speedy spread of this infection globally became a source of public worry and created a state of panic. Corona virus was first identified in Bangladesh on March 8, 2020 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare). After that, it became epidemic in Bangladesh as well as all over the world. At this time, people from the capital to the rural areas became panicked. Generally mass media became the major source of information about the novel coronavirus. It played a very important role in the dissemination of the COVID-related information to the general public in Bangladesh. During corona time, negative news, focusing on problems, has spread so much in the media that people are slowly starting to distrust and ignore them. Media coverage of pandemic using frightening language induced emotional disturbances in people (Giri & Maurya 2021)). People started to looking for reliable sources of information. And when they heard a 'message of hope' somewhere, they feel relieved. This 'message of hope' covers a large part of constructive journalism which aims to provide audiences with a fair, accurate and contextualized picture.

Usually Local correspondents of various media can influence the people by covering the news in the media. Because local news is expected to play a role in networking the local community and serving local interests (Local News, iresearch.net). This study discusses practice of constructive journalism during corona-time on journalists working for national dailies in Rajshahi. It focuses on what kind of information were disseminating by journalists during corona-time. To meet the information-need of the people what kind of journalism they practice. Whether they practiced alternative journalism outside of traditional journalism.

The study was conducted in survey method. Participants were 22 journalists working for national dailies in Rajshahi. Information were collected through questionnaire and interview method.

Introduction

Normally People are terrified during any danger or epidemics. The number of media subscribers increase during political crises and natural disasters. Mass media play a special role in providing information and making people aware of the situation during crisis situations. The media can calm the populace and encourage them to do positive actions, and vice versa, terrorized the populace and create chaos (Ghassabi & Zare-Farashbandi, 2015). So the biggest crisis of all, in other words, the 'Mother of All Crisis'- during this global epidemic, it is easy to imagine, at what level the consumer's demand can reach. The media has been using various methods to meet the demands of consumers. One of the major trends of media coverage is that media publishes what people want to know. Newsrooms determine what the audience wants by analyzing the most clicks, shares, time and so on (B Jennifer, 2016). News media play an essential role in our society. The public depends on mass media as a source of information for understanding what happens in the world (Edelman, 1988). As a result, audiences' knowledge and perceptions of events are commonly based on what is covered in the news (Lawrence and Mueller 2003). Local news has also a major impact on people's thinking. Corona virus is a completely unknown disease. People have to rely on media and websites of various institutions to get any information about it. For Example, what to do if someone has any symptoms or what is the updated information of the situation. In this study, it is trying to find out that, what kind of journalism practicing local journalists working for national dailies in Rajshahi city from perspective of constructive journalism.

Objectives of the study

This study has some specific objectives to lead the research towards some presentable findings.

The objectives are:

- 1) To investigate what types of journalism practiced by the journalists of Rajshahi during Corona time.
- 2) To study what do journalists think about people's desire for information during covid-19 period.

3) According to people's information need and desire, has there been any change in the practice of journalism? If changes, how consistent it is with constructive journalism.

It is assumed that, most of the journalists in the sampled area are not familiar with the constructive journalism approach, although they have practiced problem solving and public welfare reporting during corona-time.

Rational of the study

Constructive journalism is a new approach. Although this is being studied in other countries of the world, It goes without saying that there is no significant research on it in the field of media research in Bangladesh. I think this research will contribute to the field of constructive journalism research. Also, in media research sector in Bangladesh, central based research has always been predominant. On the other hand, this study conducted on journalists in Rajshahi city, which is far away from the capital. Through such research, it is possible to get an idea of what kind of journalism is practicing in the sampled area.

Definition of important terms

Constructive journalism: Constructive journalism is a response to increasing tabloidization, sensationalism and negativity bias of the news media today. It is an approach that aims to provide audiences with a fair, accurate and contextualized picture of the world, without overemphasizing the negative and what is going wrong (The Three Pillars, Constructive Institute). In practice, this involves exploring grey areas and nuances, looking for solutions to problems as well as exposing them, and engaging in and facilitating debate. 'Inspirational' and 'solution-oriented journalism' are based on the same ideas, and fall under the constructive journalism umbrella (Constructive journalism, Why and how journalists want to change the rules, DW Global Media Forum). In this study, constructive journalism mentions that where not only the information of an incident or problem is published, but also the detailed and contextual description of the incident and the means of solution are presented to the people in a news story.

Literature Review

It is a common phenomenon that the mass media has a big impact on daily activities of the people. There is so much negative news and news with a statement of problem spreading in our media that affect people's mental health, notably in the form of increased anxiety, depression and acute stress reactions (CL Graham, 2021). People are increasingly losing their trust in news organizations, perceiving them as biased in their coverage or as interested only in generating clicks. One effect of this is that audiences may become more susceptible to believing misinformation shared on social media (Constructive journalism, Why and how journalists want to change the rules, DW Global Media Forum). That's why outside of practice of existing journalism media experts are searching alternative journalism for a long time. The need for alternative journalism became even more apparent during Corona time. There has been a lot of research on the effects of media on people during this time. Relevant researches are discussed here.

Mildred and Gregory (2021) conducted research titled "Journalists on COVID-19 Journalism: Communication Ecology of Pandemic Reporting" discovered that during COVID-19 journalists discursively placed themselves in a responsible but vulnerable position within the communication ecology- not solely as a result of the pandemic but also from environmental conditions that long preceded it. Journalists found their reporting difficult during the pandemic and sought to mitigate the forces challenging their work as they sought to reverse the flow of misinformation. Parvin et al., (2020) made a study titled "Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: The Role of Printing Media in Asian Countries". In this study Experts' concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, published as editorial thoughts or in "Opinion" sections in the leading e-newspapers of five Asian countries in the initial 3 months of the pandemic, were analyzed. The result show that, all newspapers gave the highest level of attention to highlighting experts' concerns related to the issue of the economy. Economic issues mainly covered employment, job losses, disruption of the supply chain, negative crude oil price, and a low forecast level of GDP in all countries.

Thomas et al., (2020) conducted a study titled "How the Media Places Responsibility for the COVID-19 Pandemic—An Australian Media Analysis". The results show that framing

of the pandemic was largely based on societal issues with the theme of economic disruption prevalent throughout the study time period. Explicit examples of blame were very rare but were commonly implied based on the causal origin of the virus. The Australian printed media were slow to report on the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition they were reluctant to apportion blame until the end of the study period, after confirmed case rates had begun to slow. Nazrin et al., (2021) did a research titled “Reactions to the media coverage during the first wave of COVID-19 in Bangladesh”. The results of the study show that, The readers were resentful of the all-pervasive corruption in the health sector even in times of a pandemic and the Government's poorly coordinated, fragmented, and delayed COVID-19 response. The pandemic severely shook their trust in the already weak health system and perceived it to be incompetent, corrupt, and non-responsive. They had deplorable personal and family experiences while seeking treatment for COVID-19 patients.

The present study has some different dimensions. It explores the constructive journalism practices of journalists working in Rajshahi City from ‘Covid-19’ perspective.

History

The content in most of the media in our country has become increasingly negative over time. Approximately 90% of all media news is negative (16 Eye-Opening Negative News Statistics for 2022, Letter.ly). It's become one of the main trends in the media. In Bangladesh, this trend has taken a terrible turn. Something is negative means, it's a news. By analyzing the local news of a national newspaper it can be seen that almost all the news items are covered from negative perspective or they related to various problems. The negative content of news reporting is likely in part motivated by the fact that the human mind is more likely to be attracted to, carefully watch, and become fixated upon something that is negative than something that is positive. However, the implications of this for news reporting are that news sources that provide negative reporting will generally thus end up with more viewers (Trussler, 2014).

There is thus strong incentive, for media success, to report negative news. Currently, due to online dependent journalism, the trend of 'Clickbait' news has increased where negative and sensational news is being deliberately spread in online platform and social

media. Newsfeeds related to COVID-19 infection and death rates considerably increase the risk of mental health problems (Zhaohui Su, 2021).

A recent analysis show that, in Bangladesh, the COVID-19 related information reaching the people, including misinformation, disinformation, and rumors was equivocal in the early months of the pandemic and failed to build the trust and transparency that is necessary for an inclusive response across constituencies (Nazrin, 2021). On the other hand, local journalists have many obstacles. Before making any news story, a journalist have to think about the impact it may have. The media owners and executives also think that negative news is more likely to be consumed by people and therefore these news items need to be given first. For a long time, there has been a lot of thinking about an alternative form of journalism, which will not cause of annoyance among people, it could be the 'constructive journalism', solution based journalism.

Methodology

Among the different methods of data gathering for research purposes, the survey method is preferred by many researchers due to its various advantages, strengths, and benefits. In this research work survey method has been used. Total of 22 journalists from top 22 newspapers (based on the number of circulation) were selected purposively as sample. Name of the newspapers the sampled journalists working for and their designation are bellow:

Newspaper name	Designation of the journalist
Ajker Business Bangladesh	Rajshahi Correspondent
Ajker Patrika	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Alokito Bangladesh	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Amader Shomoy	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Asian Age	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Bangladesh Pratidin	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Bangladesher Alo	Staff Reporter
Bonik Barta	Rajshahi Correspondent
Daily Prothom Alo	Rajshahi Correspondent
Dainik Dinkal	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Desh Rupantor	Staff Reporter
Inqilab	Rajshahi Correspondent
Jaijai Din	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Janakantha	Staff Reporter
Jugantor	Rajshahi Bureau Chief

Kaler kantho	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Khola kagoj	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
Manab Zamin	Staff Reporter
Manob Kantha	Staff Reporter
New age	Rajshahi Correspondent
Shomoyer Alo	Rajshahi Bureau Chief
The Daily Observer	Rajshahi Bureau Chief

A questionnaire based on 19 questions was used for data collection. The questionnaire arranged in such a way to collect some basic information of the journalists and the enquiry of the study tried to unearth some answers based on some questions related to research title. The journalists were interviewed in depth for collecting some data and know their thoughts and their practice of various aspects of journalism. And the data has been analyzed both qualitative and quantitatively.

For questionnaire, open-ended and close-ended questions have been used. The investigator was active and clarified doubts and ambiguities when the respondents filled up the questionnaire. After the filling up the questionnaire all the data was recorded in order to analyze.

Data presentation and analysis

In this Study, the number of participants was in total 22 journalists. The information collected from them through questionnaire and interviews is presented here.

Table-01: Type of information in corona reporting		
Challenges in journalism during corona-time?	Yes	77.28 %
	No	22.72 %
Types of challenges	Problems of collecting information	18.18 %
	Lack of accurate and authentic information	31.81 %
	Health risks	27.27 %

	Transport problems	18.18 %
	Others	4.54 %
Source of information in corona reporting	Hospital authorities	13.63 %
	Personal Interview	45.45 %
	Press release	22.72 %
	Online sites and social media	9.09 %
	News agencies	9.09 %
Interviewing a person who has been infected with the corona virus or has become corona-free.	Yes	90.91 %
	No	9.09 %
What kind of information were they (infected or corona-free person) more interested in providing?	Personal Experience	54.54 %
	Medical information	27.27 %
	Information on social issues	4.54 %
	Information on the cure	13.63 %
	Others	0
People were more interested to know the information.	Daily updates	22.72 %
	Number of infected and dead	27.27 %
	Corona situation in the area	27.27 %
	Corona prevention information	18.18 %
	Information about corona treatment	13.63 %

Data of table-1 shows the type of information the respondent journalists used in corona reporting. In a question the journalists were asked that, had he faced any challenges in doing journalism during corona-time? 77.28 percent of the journalists responded in the

affirmative and the remaining 22.72 percent answered in the negative to this question. Result showed, 18.18 percent of the respondents said their challenge is problems of collecting information, 31.81 percent of respondents mentioned lack of accurate and authentic information as a challenge, health risks mentioned by 27.27 percent, 18.18 percent faced transport problems and 4.54 percent of respondents faced some other problems. Some of the respondent journalists were interviewed to find out details about the challenges. They said, people who recovered after being infected do not want to give information when talking to them. Faisal Ahmed, who is working for jagonews24.com said, ‘we had to go to the hospital to make reports on corona virus. Coming back from the hospital we actually had to worry about the safety of ourselves and our family members.’ Rimon Rahman is working with The Daily Ajker Patrika said that, it was difficult to verify whether any information was true or wrong.

Most of the sampled journalists were getting the information of corona reporting was mainly from personal interviews and it was 45.45 percent. And some other sources of information in corona reporting are hospital authorities, press release, online sites and social media and news agencies are respectively 13.63 percent, 22.72 percent, 9.09 percent and 9.09 percent. 90.91 percent of the sampled journalists interviewed persons who has been infected with the corona virus or has become corona-free. In 54.54 percent of cases their interviewees are more interested in providing personal experience related information and the other cases they were interested to provide medical information, Information on social issues and information on the cure. A question asked to the journalists that what kind of information does he/she think people were more interested to know from media during corona-time. The results show that, 22.72 percent of respondents thought people were more interested to know daily updates, 27.27 percent thought it was number of infected and dead, 27.27 percent thought that people were interested about corona situation in the area, 18.18 percent thought it was Corona prevention information and remaining 13.63 percent of respondents thought people were interested about corona treatment information.

Table-2: Practice of journalism: thinking of respondent journalists and types of their reports during corona time on Constructive Journalism perspective

Do you think special information needs have been created among the people during corona-time?	Yes	90.91 %
	No	9.09 %
Thinking about alternatives to existing journalism	Yes	81.82 %
	No	18.18 %
Types of reports	Simple report	18.18 %
	Feature story	31.82 %
	Investigative report	22.72 %
	Interpretative report	4.54 %
	Daily corona updates	22.72 %
Reports focused on	Providing information	22.72 %
	Providing and interpreting information	22.72 %
	Creating awareness	40.91 %
	To present various problems	9.09 %
	To present the ways to solve problems	4.54 %
Category of the reports	Positive	40.91 %
	Negative	59.09 %
When making a report, does he consider whether the report will have any effect on the audience?	Yes	72.73 %
	No	27.27 %
Effect of negative news on audience he thought	Audience feels good	22.72 %
	Negative perceptions about society creates	13.63 %

	Confidence in the media grows	9.09 %
	Confidence in the media decreases	18.18 %
	Panic is created among the people	36.36 %
Knowledge about Constructive Journalism	Know	4.54 %
	Do not know	95.46 %

One of the goals of this study is to know what do journalists think about people's desire for information during covid-19 period and in that case, has there been any change in the practice of journalism? Respondents were asked a question about this. Answers show that 90.91 percent of participants think that special information needs have been created among the people during corona-time and the other 9.09 percent do not think so. And considering the special information needs, 81.82 percent of respondent journalists thought to practice alternatives to existing journalism. The respondent journalists interviewed to know what kind of special information needs have been risen among the people. SM Saju, correspondent of Daily Shomoyer Alo said, 'people were facing a new crisis. In such a situation, they have to rely on the media to get information. So during this time people's dependence on the media increased.' Shafiqul Islam, Rajshahi correspondent of The Daily Prothom Alo Said, 'during this time people depended on the media for all kinds of information like what they would do, how to solve problems, and how to get treatment etc. So the accountability of the media workers has increased.'

'There were various rumors spreading during corona-time', said Raju Ahammed, a local correspondent of Daily Observer. He added, 'there were rumors among the people about corona treatment, quarantine and various other issues. At that time the eyes of the conscious people were on the media. They always hoped that the media would provide accurate information to the people.'

Instead of these information need what kind of change has taken place in the practice of journalism, they said in answers to this question that, during corona-time, journalists

had to rethink their responsibilities. Journalism is not limited to just providing information to the people, there is an opportunity to work in a wider range, this perception has been created during corona-time. Journalists' mentality of reporting in the interest of people has been created.

The statistics in the table-2 show that, 18.18 percent of sampled journalists were making simple news story during corona time, 31.82 percent feature story, 22.72 percent investigative reports, 4.54 percent interpretative reports and other 22.72 percent of journalists were reporting about daily corona updates during corona time. And 22.72 percent of these reports were aims to provide information to the audiences, 22.72 percent for providing and interpreting information, 40.91 percent for creating awareness, 9.09 percent to present various problems and the rest 4.54 percent reports of the journalists aim to present the ways to solve various problems. Statistics show that 40.91 percent of journalists were reporting mostly positive story and other 59.09 percent made negative story. When making a report, 72.73 percent of respondents consider whether the report will affect the audience and other 27.27 percent do not consider it. The respondent journalists were asked about the impact of negative news on the audience. 22.72 percent of them said, audience feels good, 13.63 percent said negative perceptions about society creates in the audience, 9.09 percent said people's confidence in the media grows, 18.18 percent said confidence in the media decreases and other 36.36 percent of the sampled journalists said panic is created among the people through negative news. Finally, respondents' knowledge about Constructive Journalism is try to know through the questionnaire. And the result shows that, 95.46 percent of respondents do not know about the approach and the rest 4.54 percent heard about it.

Conclusion

There were many challenges in doing journalism during corona period such as problems of collecting information, lack of accurate and authentic information, health risks etc. Nevertheless, respondent journalists gathered news information from various sources and their major source of information was personal interviews of the people. It was assumed that, most of the journalists in the sampled area are not familiar with the constructive journalism approach, respondent journalists of this study said the same,

most of them were not familiar with constructive journalism, because this is a new approach. 95.46 percent of respondents of the study don't even know the constructive journalism term. But when making a report, 72.73 percent of respondents consider whether the report will affect the audience and other 27.27 percent do not consider it. Most of the journalists were reporting negative story during corona time but most of them (36.36 percent) said that negative news creates panic among the people. This study says 90.91 percent of participants think that special information desires have been risen among the people during corona time and considering this point 81.82 percent of respondent journalists thought to practice alternatives to existing journalism. Respondent Journalists said people's dependence on the media and accountability of the media workers increased during corona time.

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