

# Public perception of media's role during COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

This article represents an example of a non-Western study into the public perception of the mass media's role during the coronavirus pandemic in Bangladesh, which is of particular importance given the global environment of a high level of informational uncertainty and health risk that is equally applicable to countries around the world. Quantitative research methodology was used to gather perceptions of citizens across the country on the role and performance of the mass media's coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. The responses gathered demonstrated that the pandemic generated an increased demand for news and information on the virus, which was used as a means of attempting to reduce personal risk and harm. In this time of an increased demand for information, respondents tended to perceive the information that they received from mainstream media news sources as being credible and rated media performance positively. This final observation is seemingly bucking the general global trend of decreased public trust in news media sources.

## Keywords

Coronavirus, infodemic, Bangladesh, mass media, journalism.

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## Introduction

COVID-19 news began to emerge from Wuhan, China, in 2019. The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a highly infectious diseases in the 21st century (Rahman & Shati, 2020). It has collapsed the highly interconnected global system, such as the economy, health, communication, transportation, education, etc. (Karasneh et al., 2020). Bangladesh in South-Asia followed these same trends and the first COVID-19 affected person was in March 2020. The government has frequently announced all types of treatment, prevention and measurement, but the role and action of government activities is still debatable (Anwer et al., 2020). However, the government of Bangladesh is actively working and taking steps for tackling COVID-19 (Kabir, 2020). The Prime Minister of Bangladesh has regularly communicated with district COVID-19 prevention committees. Infodemic, misinformation and fake news have created a negative hive among general people and the government has taken different initiatives for combating it. COVID-19 test mobile and web apps, COVID-19 information-based web portal, new media and traditional media are initiated by the government of Bangladesh to spread the news among the online and offline communities (SACMID, 2020).

Bangladeshi media houses are broadcasting different types of COVID-19 related information like statistics, audio-visual content, articles and opinion on the media's web portal as well as differently oriented versions of newspapers. However, journalism is not working freely due to the Digital Security Act (2019). However, the Government of Bangladesh had taken a news or content screening on private televisions, news portals and social media platforms from the 26th of March (Nahid, 2020). The level of Freedom of Speech is decreasing during COVID-19 in Bangladesh according to Reporters Without Borders.

The new media, mainstream and traditional media are promoting campaigns against COVID-19 helps to maintain the social distance and awareness among Bangladeshi people (Mejia et al., 2020). Media play a vital role in creating public perception of COVID-19 in news coverage. Recently, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has conducted a perception survey where 66% respondents learnt or empowered themselves through television. The significance of this article is the inclusion of a non-Western country, Bangladesh, as the subject of research and one that is not often included in international research.

The objectives of this study explore the people's perception on media's role and how media create an impact on people's thinking from a non-Western setting and seek to fill a gap by addressing the attitudes, concerns and perceptions of the audience during the global pandemic. The questions of this research are: What do people think they know about COVID-19 from information seeking?

How do people perceive the media's role on COVID-19? Is COVID-19 an issue that can change the public's perception in favour of restoration of the media's role in society?

This article begins by addressing the theoretical foundations and considerations that inform the collected empirical content. Then the following section engages in the current state of the art literature review on academic material engaging in the communicative aspects of the pandemic. Methodology is the topic of the following section. Before moving into the case study, which includes the effects of the pandemic and its communication in Bangladesh through an opinion survey, where respondents discuss how they perceive and react to the information environment, together with an analysis of these responses and reflections.

## **Theoretical considerations**

With the development of social sciences and communication studies in the wake of two world wars, from the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the development of a number of theories and explanations dealing with media functions. Lewin (1947) wrote about the role of social institutions as being channels or gates for the interaction and communication of a group, the movement of goods and ideas. He argued that 'gate sections' are governed by either impartial rules or by gatekeepers. In the later, the gatekeepers, the in-power group dictates the rules. If social change occurs, then the gatekeepers also change or are influenced (Lewin, 1947). Mass media are a gatekeeper of information, hence influence the quality of information, although the technical ability to do so in the current state of information communication technologies is compromised owing to their loss on the monopoly of the means of mass communication. Laswell (1948) understands communication as a social institution that distributes and shapes the values and norms of a society, appealing to mobilising and influencing the minds, attitudes and behaviour of its citizens. The communication process in society performs three functions: surveillance of the environment; correlation of society's components; and transmission of the social inheritance (Laswell, 1948). McCombs (1977) developed a deeper understanding of the agenda setting function of mass media, where many attempts were noted when media campaigns attempted to persuade publics. Conventional wisdom of the time revealed that media seldom changed the attitudes and behaviour of audiences, so the notion of persuasion was unrealistic. However, McCombs noted that while media could not tell people what to think, they did tell people what to think about.

Central to understanding and making sense of the data derived from the responses received in this preliminary research is through Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) Hierarchy of Influences model, which was used to describe the various factors that affect news content that is organised as factors along a continuum from individual to social levels (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Reese, 2019; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). This continuum is organised into five different levels that include the *individual*, *routine*, *organisational*, *socio-institutional* and *social systems* levels of influence (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Journalism and mass media are potentially very influential in shaping public perception of key events, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, which makes tracking various influences on news content a vital task.

The Hierarchy of Influences model is a key concept in journalism studies (Franklin et al., 2005) that identifies various influences on media content and then establishes these influences into a more detailed framework (Reese, 2019) that can be used to provide additional explanatory power to the observed patterns and trends. In this paper, the Hierarchy of Influences model is repurposed to understand the audience perception of the media's role in its news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. As such, the responses received indicated several key elements as the importance and central place of the audience perception of the role of mass media and journalism in society, media audience reception and risk's impact on information seeking.

### **Perception of mass media and journalism's role in society**

Currently there is a gap in perception concerning journalistic role conception and role enactment (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Hellmueller & Vos, 2013; Himelboim & Limor, 2010; Tandoc, 2013). In Western media and journalism there are three enduring normative values: authenticity, accountability, and autonomy. These affect the perceived credibility of journalists and their content, hence the attempt to keep these alive even if the returns and relevance have diminished (Hayes et al., 2007). One of the regular criticisms aimed at media institutions and journalists is that they are not fulfilling their role in society. A study by Himelboim and Limor (2010) analysed 242 codes of ethics from 94 countries to identify the perceived social role, which was rather consensual and involved the values of neutrality, detached from society and defensive against the loci of power. In a literature review, Hanitzsch (2007) proposes that journalism culture consists of three essential constituents (institutional roles, epistemologies and ethical ideologies) and divided further into seven principal dimensions

(interventionism, power distance, market orientation, objectivism, empiricism, relativism and idealism). Other researchers, such as Mellado (2015) propose six dimensions in the role performance of journalism: intervention; watchdog; loyal facilitator; service; infotainment and a civic model. She stresses that these roles can overlap in practice, simultaneously displaying different dimensions. This can also be a reflection on the variations of journalistic cultures across nations.

The ideas concerning the contemporary definition of the concept and role of journalism and mass media are open to interpretation but are also contested and evolving. A study on Danish journalists and how they perceived and implement the key professional normative value of objectivity found it was very open to interpretation, where different journalistic cultures and different circumstances influenced the production, publication and perception of news (Skovgaard et al., 2013). Singer (2007) notes the commitment to truth and transparency (public accountability) are central normative values of professional journalism. However, this is increasingly being challenged and questioned by popular communicators (including bloggers) in the contemporary media environment. This has meant journalism has lost the monopoly in defining and publicly articulating its professional constructs, which are being reinterpreted. The institutional identity of journalism is constructed and contested discursively.

Journalistic roles are articulated and enacted on two distinct levels: role orientations (normative and cognitive) and role performance (practiced and narrated roles). The process model of journalistic roles proposes a circular structure, where normative, cognitive, practiced, and narrated roles are connected through processes of internalisation, enactment, reflection, normalisation, and negotiation (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). This relational and discursive approach to analysing and understanding journalism reveals the fluid nature of the process. Traditionally, journalistic capital has relied on the distinct division between journalists and audiences. In the current situation, these distinctions are much less obvious. This has led to the 'misalignment between journalists and the public's views of journalistic roles' that are having an impact 'in the profession's external legitimacy' (Vos et al., 2019). There are different divides evident between different groups on a national to global scale.

In a study involving the examination of journalistic culture across 66 nations, it was concluded that journalism is undergoing a great deal of change through transformations and developments in many different countries (Hanusch &

Hanitzsch, 2017), therefore it is problematic to assume one particular model, such as liberal journalism as being universally applied on a global scale. From a case study involving judicial reform in Pakistan, the role of newspapers went beyond the role of merely informing and letting the audience decide, but to actively engage in the construction of social reality in the minds of the public. The author concluded, 'on the basis of findings it is suggested that to activate people on certain issues and making up their perceptions or shaping up the judgements, newspapers can play a vital role in producing change in society' (Sadaf, 2011).

### **Review of existing literature on communicating the coronavirus**

This section is intended to set the background for a brief overview of the enormous current state of the art literature review on academic literature on the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic as it stood in December 2020. General searches were conducted using general internet search engines for academic literature using keywords such as: 'corona virus' and 'COVID-19' and 'novel coronavirus'. This was supplemented with a snowballing technique of finding other 'related articles' related relevant articles that were successfully located.

The current state of art of published academic research is focused on several key aspects of the coronavirus pandemic. These include: the physical and psychological impact; evaluations of mass media and social media coverage; audience perception and information seeking patterns. It should be noted that there is often interaction between these various categories within any one article. Within the category area of the physical and psychological impact of the coronavirus, there are at least two different topic trends, one that relates to understanding human anxiety caused by the virus and the other concerning resilience in face of the challenges caused by COVID-19. Lee (2020) argues that the mental health concerns of people impacted by the pandemic have not been adequately addressed. The aim of his paper was to develop a coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS) in order to create a mental health screener that will identify at risk and affected people. Other research has focused on describing the stressful psychological conditions faced by specific groups (Ma & Miller, 2020). Bryce et al. (2020) focused on the study of organizational response to the pandemic (namely the National Health Service) in the face of a great deal of uncertainty in the physical and information domains. This is in reference to the idea of building organizational resilience. These papers fell within the academic disciplines of management, psychology, risk, health and death studies.

Diverse trends and perspectives are also observed in the growing academic literature base on the topic of the evaluations of mass media and social media performance and role during the pandemic. An outlier is the article by Fu and Zhu (2020) that poses the question if the world overlooked mass media and social media in China and global news that were giving an early warning in the early stages of the pandemic. Other papers focused on how media shaped knowledge and awareness among medical professionals (Karasneh et al., 2020) or the media role in validating fear perception and the magnitude of COVID-19 (Mejia et al., 2020). There is also a rapidly growing direction that is identifying and analysing the issues of trust in media (Liu et al., 2020) as well as misleading and misinformation in mass media coverage of the pandemic (Baptista Ferreira & Borges, 2020; Jamil & Appiah-Adjeh, 2020; Motta et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). There is also academic interest in social media research, on the element of social media in terms of communicating the health and crisis dimensions (Yu et al., 2020) and social media as a source of misinformation on the virus or key actors involved in the crisis (Au et al., 2020). Actions and trends in terms of the quantity and quality of information has impacted upon the cognitive domain.

Audience perception and information seeking also proved to be rather diverse in nature. This includes the perspective of the communication flows on the pandemic as being an ‘infodemic’ (couched as a medical condition - information epidemic) (Nielsen et al., 2020), and the role of perception (Dryhurst et al., 2020; McFadden et al., 2020) and how it affects actions based on trust (Chakraborty, 2020; Llewellyn, 2020; Rahman & Sathi, 2020) and fact checking (Krause et al., 2020). The previously mentioned research aspects affect public perception and trust in the policy response by the authorities (Esaiasson et al, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Siddika & Islam, 2020) and this impacts upon the compliance with that policy (Wong & Jensen, 2020).

## **Methodology**

The objectives of this study demand a quantitative research approach. Analysing different research articles also navigated a cross-sectional study because it gives information about what is happening in a current population. A web-based survey was carried-out from June 1 to June 30, 2020. From 31 May to 15 June 2020, the Ministry of Public Administration, Bangladesh, has circulated a notification that the government has decided to conditionally carry out the overall activities in the country and the movement of the public.

This research aim was to investigate the public perception before and after the lockdown.

We have followed a purposive sampling technique to select necessary samples from our target population. As a result of that, the questionnaires were shared among people of different professionals. Prior to the survey, people were duly informed regarding the purpose of the research and assured about the data privacy and confidentiality of their feedback. Questionnaire was utilized and shared with the respondents by using Email and different digital platforms. Considering, 95% level of confidence and 5% acceptable margin of error ( $d=0.05$ ), we estimated the desired sample size following Cochran's formula,  $n = z^2 p(1-p) / d^2$

We assumed that the sample proportion was 0.5 because it provides the maximum sample size. Thus, we estimated the sample size and the required sample size was 385. A total of 392 respondents that completed the questionnaires were included in the final analysis. So, our sample size represents the overall population.

A self-reported structured questionnaire was developed using Google forms and the invitation link to the survey questionnaire was sent nationwide via social media, messaging apps, and email. There is no capability to track the participant of this research. SPSS software was used as a tool of data analysis in this research. Structural Equation Model & other necessary statistics used for showing the relationship between peoples and media's role during COVID-19 times.

## **Questionnaire developed**

The questionnaire was written in English for preparing the study report. After the pilot test, the final questionnaire comprised four items including closed ended questions. The answer options were multiple choice formats and Likert scale. Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree strongly, disagree. These were coded by assigning number points for each question. Participants were able to choose only one answer to each of the questions.

## Presentation of the survey data

Table 1

Demographic information		Number	Percentage (%)
Variables			
Sex	Female	157	40.9
	Male	227	59.1
Age	<25 years	10	2.6
	26-35 years	143	37.2
	36-45 years	179	46.6
	46-55 years	44	11.5
	>55 years	8	2.1
Educational level	Primary	37	9.6
	S.S.C/H.S.C	97	25.3
	Graduation	105	27.4
	Post-Graduation	136	35.4
	PhD	9	2.3
Place of living	Rural	141	36.7
	Urban	243	63.3
Do you have any job right now?	No	168	43.7
	Yes	216	56.3
I'm feeling tensed about my financial condition?	No	124	32.3
	Yes	260	67.7
Still, need to go to the workplace?	No	287	74.7
	Yes	97	25.3

In total 392 respondents participated in this study (see *Table 1*). Before the pandemic 43.9% respondents used online news platforms for getting updated information but after the COVID-19 outbreak this rate decreased to 37% (see *Figure 1*). The significant change happened when news has been consumed in social media. In general time, 25% respondents used social media for getting information but during the COVID this rate had increased to 34.9%. Other sources had not made any significant changes in terms of news consumption due to COVID-19.

Figure 1

**Trends of news consumption across media before and during COVID-19 pandemic**

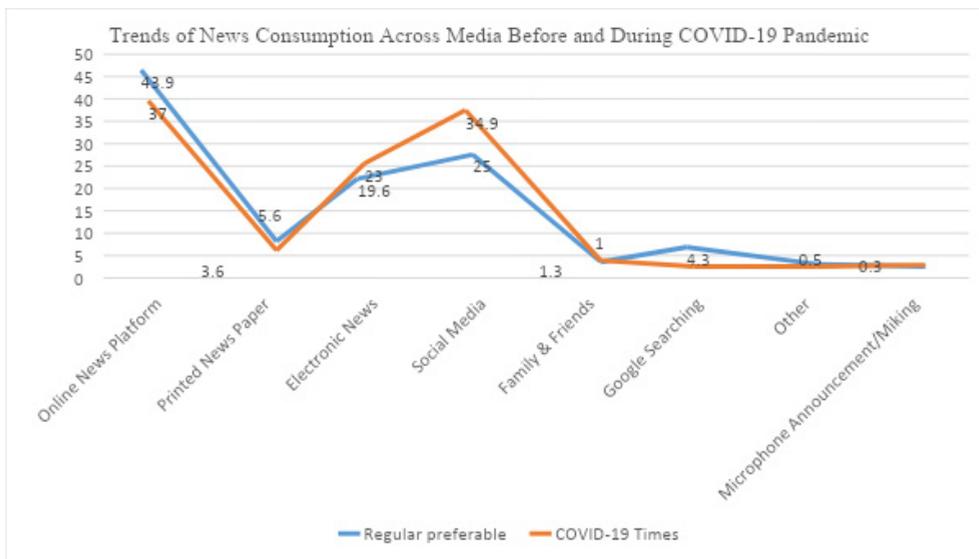
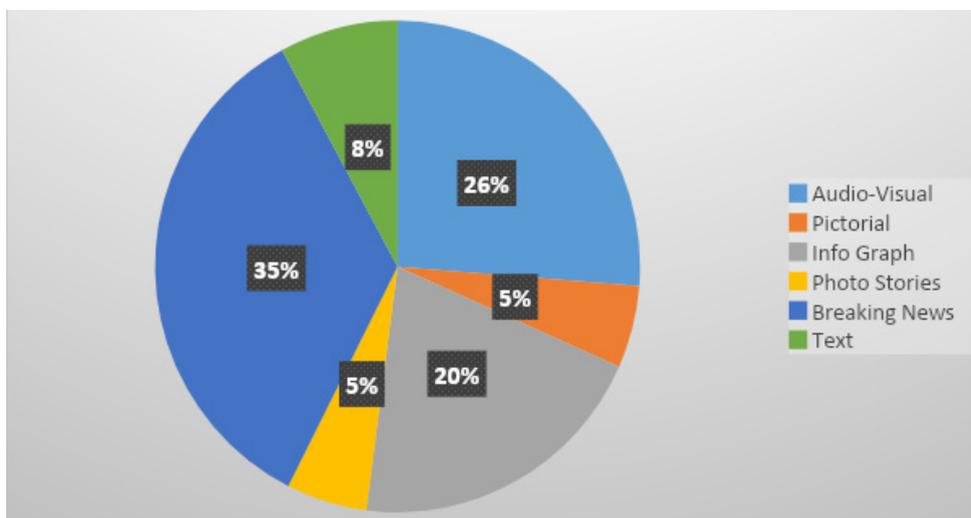


Figure 2

**Preferable mass media content in COVID-19 related news**



Question pertaining to which mass media content of the news sources respondents usually followed (see *Figure* ) and it was explored that 35% respondents preferred audio-visual content of COVID-19 related news, 26% respondents were comfortable with the breaking news updates of coronavirus. In this study, 20% respondents followed infographic materials of COVID-19. Pictorial, photo stories and textual based content had not been seen to gain enough attention among respondents.

### **Public perception on media's role**

A question was asked about the satisfaction of mass media coverage of COVID-19. Strongly agreed 10.2%, 39.3% agreed, 16.6% disagreed, 6.9% strongly disagreed. Importantly, 27% of respondents were neutral.

Infodemic is one of the integral parts of COVID-19 pandemic. A question was asked about the reliable and authentic news on COVID-19 published by different media organizations. Strongly agreed 9.7% people, 42.6% agreed and 16.1% disagreed, 5.6% strongly disagreed. In the answer of this question, 26% of respondents were neutral.

Bangladeshi mainstream news media were publishing different types of updated and awareness related media content that helped general people to increase their knowledge on COVID-19. By adding responses of agree and strongly agree, the cumulated answer is 65%, 13.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed regarding coping with COVID-19 media content presentation. Neutral answers stayed 20.9% of respondents.

A question was asked about the Bangladeshi news media frequently providing updates on COVID-19. Overall, 79.1% respondents were in favour in the statement that the news media actively covered COVID-19 news. Only 8.6% respondents (combined) disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement, where 12.2% were neutral.

During the pandemic period, different news websites published more updated news on COVID-19 than mainstream media (TV, radio and newspaper). By adding responses of agree and strongly agree, 68.4% respondents were in favour in the statement. On the other hand, 8.7% respondents combined disagreed & strongly disagreed with this statement and 23% respondents stayed neutral in this question.

A question was asked about the mass media's role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID-19. The data set showed 84.2% respondents said that the news media played a significant role in forming & influencing people's attitudes on COVID-19. Collectively 7.9% respondents disagreed with this statement and 7.9% respondents remained neutral.

We found that 85.5% respondents believed that news media were actually responsible for enhancing public knowledge on preventative public health measures. Collectively only 4.6% respondents thought that the mass media didn't increase any knowledge on preventative health issues and 9.9% respondents stayed neutral in this statement.

According to the survey data, collectively 71.9% respondents said that during the lockdown time they benefited from mass media's news to get in rational thinking whereas 11.7% didn't change their rationality and thinking through the media. Respondents stayed neutral at 16.3%.

A question was asked about the mass media's role in building public awareness on COVID-19 among the different classes of people. Collectively 79.3% respondents were agreed & strongly agreed regarding mass media's role on making awareness among different social groups. The 8.1% is the cumulative percentage of respondents who are not in the favour of the statement and 12.5% respondents were neutral.

During the pandemic situation, frequently updated news that people consumed from different channels made them confused about taking the correct decision on COVID-19. Having realized that a question was asked to know about the media's exaggeration of negative impacts on human minds associated with the COVID-19. After compiling the results of responses, 58.9% agreed and strongly agreed, whereas collectively 15.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed about exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks created by the news media. Respondents stayed neutral at 25.8%.

A question was asked to find out the worries about people's future careers after reading newspapers and COVID-19 effects in their personal lives. Collectively 83.2% respondents believed this statement. On the other hand, cumulatively, 6.4% respondents showed disagreement with the statement and 10.5% respondents stayed neutral.

A question was asked to understand whether people can consider social media as a credible news source rather than mainstream media. Collectively 28.8% respondents agreed and strongly agreed. Combined 40.3% respondents showed their trust on mainstream media as a source of news during COVID-19 times. On the other hand, 20.9% respondents stayed neutral.

We asked if during the pandemic situations people were influenced by social media content more than mainstream media or not, in against collectively 41.6% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, whereas cumulatively 37.5% respondents agreed and strongly agreed with people being influenced by social media content more than mainstream media content. Some of the respondents, 20.9% indicated neutral.

A question was posed to understand whether people managed to navigate easily on demand media content on COVID-19 from news websites. By adding the responses of agree and strongly agree, the cumulated answer is 57.9%. Collectively only 12% respondents showed disagreement with the statement. About 30.1% respondents stayed neutral.

A question was asked to understand the public perception of freedom of expression that whether the media enjoyed publishing unregulated information on COVID-19. Statistics show that, collectively 40.8% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement and they believed that Bangladeshi news media have not been enjoying press freedom in publishing COVID-19 information. On the other hand, 23% respondents stayed neutral and finally 36.2% respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement.

Bangladesh still has the lowest press freedom among many other South Asian countries. According to Reporters Without Borders, Bangladesh ranked 152nd out of 180 countries in 2021 World Press Freedom Index. Hundreds of journalists and human rights activists have been detained since the Bangladesh government imposed the controversial Digital Security Act in 2018.

A question was asked if Bangladesh news media had been politically biased in covering COVID-19 or not. Combined 63.3% respondents supported this statement, collectively 13.1% respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement whereas 23.7% respondents were neutral.

This is also relevant to know why mainstream media and news agencies are unintentionally publishing misleading and fabricated news. A question was asked that Bangladeshi media published misleading or fabricated news on COVID-19. Following the previous question, more or less similar types of response are achieved regarding this statement. Adding agree and strongly agree, 63.8% respondents had similar statements thought, collectively 12.3% disagreed and strongly disagreed. In this statement, 24% respondents stayed neutral.

People frequently visited news portals and followed mainstream media for getting coronavirus news. In this case, a question was asked that after following the news media public understood the present reality and impact of COVID-19. Collectively 76.8% respondents were in favour of the statement. This is a significant number of people who are following news media and understanding the COVID-19 present status and reality. Adding 8.9% respondents

showed disagreement with this statement and 14.3% respondents stayed neutral.

Mass media has the power to influence the human thinking process like making judgmental decisions or statements. A question was asked that the mass media has influenced the public decision process. Collectively 74.5% respondents were positive, collectively 9.7% respondents were against this statement and 15.8% of respondents stayed neutral.

## Survey data analysis

In order to shed light on the research questions, our analysis framework consists of three different stages. In the first stage we have done univariate analysis. Univariate analysis is where the data being analysed contains only one variable. The main purpose of univariate analysis is to describe the data and find patterns that exist within it.

In the second phase, we have done bivariate analysis. It involves the analysis of two variables to determine the empirical relationship between them. Bivariate analysis can be helpful in testing simple hypotheses of association. Chi-squared statistics is used for our hypothesis testing. It represents a single number that explains the difference between our sample counts and the expected counts if there were no relationship at all in the population. In bivariate analysis, we have explored the relationship among variables with a second research question, how do people perceive the media's role on COVID-19.

To improve measurement reliability and validity, we have conducted multivariate analysis in the third phase of our framework. We have performed Factor Analysis using an orthogonal factor model to extract factors related to the media's perception from people. Then we have used SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) to understand the nature of the relationships. Our result of multivariate analysis is supported by p-value which tells about if test results are significant or not.

## Univariate analysis

We have done univariate analysis based on three individual aspects in order to answer the research question.

RQ1: What do people think they know about COVID-19 from information seeking?

From our data, we can see that 91% of the total participants know about the origin of COVID-19 and 27% of them are aged between 26-30 and 41% of them is underage or 25 and most of them are university students or at least

graduate. Among the total sample, 95.4% of them believe that staying at home is the best way to prevent this situation and most of them are urban dwellers (87.2%). Study shows that, 92.9% of them believe that it's transmitted through the infected person's coughs, sneezes or exhales among which 89.1% is working or employed though 4.1% of people doesn't know that touching a contaminated surface and then your eyes, nose or mouth can transmit COVID-19. Most of them are living in urban regions (87.2). Among the participants, 85.7% of them are conscious about COVID-19 recovery time although 60% of them believe that order people are more prone to be affected.

RQ2: How do people perceive the media's role on COVID-19?

From our analysis, we can see that online news platforms (44%) are the most widely accepted news media but 35% of people accept the information that is spread through the social media regarding COVID-19 and 37% of people rely on other online news media. But 16.6% people are not satisfied with the media coverage of Bangladesh. On the other hand, 59.9% people strongly believe the media has played a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID and how to prepare for it as well as in increasing public knowledge on preventative public health measures. This apparent contradiction is due to the education level, living areas and age of the participant. Because 55.6% people strongly believe the media helped them in making rational decisions during lockdown time. Most of them are educated (95.8%) and living in urban areas.

RQ3: Is COVID-19 an issue that can change the public's perception in favour of restoration of the media's role in society?

Our result shows that 44.9% people strongly think that the news media have exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks associated with the virus, 73% of people get more worried about the future of my life than pre-COVID-19 time. And 40% people agree with the concept of political biases of the media covering COVID-19. 46.2% people strongly believe that Bangladeshi media sometimes publishes misleading or fabricated news on COVID-19 and so the news consumption rate is decaying. So, it will be difficult to change the public's perception in favour of restoration of the media's idealised role in society.

## **Bivariate analysis**

In this bivariate analysis part, cross tabulation technique is applied to identify the pair-wise relation between media perception of people with other relevant variables. The results of the bivariate analysis are presented in the table in this section.

Table 2

## Variable significance test

Variables	Value of Chi-Square	P-value	Decision
Perception about media vs Which form of Media did you get informed about COVID-19?	11.242	.0047	Significant
Perception about media vs When did the public first hear about COVID-19?	17.752	.003	Significant
Perception about media vs What types transmission of contents do you prefer in COVID-19 related news	27.572	.00	Significant
Perception about media vs How many times do you visit your desired news portal or medium for getting more updates	5.862	.015	Significant
Perception about media vs Compared to the pre-COVID-19 situation, how would you rate your news consumption	50.926	.00	Significant
Perception about media vs Preferable news agency	18.655	.00	Significant

As we know, the p-value is larger than the significance level, we fail to reject the null hypothesis because there is not enough evidence to conclude that the variables are associated. In our case, all of the selected variables seem to be significant from the statistical point of view.

### Multivariate analysis

We have done factor analysis followed by structural equation modelling to extract the crucial causal factors. In this analysis, we have considered variables from V0 through V26. These variables are Gender, Age, Educational Attainment, Occupation, Area of living, preferable mass media, respondent's knowledge on COVID-19, media coverage and all the variables used to analyse media's role and relationship between the COVID-19 content and public perception.

### Construction of correlation matrix

For factor analysis we need to first construct a correlation matrix. Generally, it's a correlation matrix is a lower triangle matrix showing the simple correlations between all possible pairs of variables included in the analysis.

Table 3

Correlation matrix

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
0	1	0.53148	0.45622	0.71794	0.7426	0.81188	0.15175	0.69872	0.3228	0.66208	0.3595	0.87999	0.09873	0.07342	0.48611	0.92286	0.42272	0.18073	0.30132	0.35681	0.25478	0.17517	0.9234	0.29107	0.21698	0.07649	0.65676
1	0.92283	1	0.55017	0.06693	0.72201	0.38087	0.94415	0.25986	0.90488	0.63574	0.77619	0.8428	0.36898	0.76828	0.76147	0.11162	0.17396	0.42328	0.91879	0.45113	0.0114	0.90442	0.16325	0.39165	0.48919	0.37399	0.04572
2	0.33535	0.66866	1	0.77469	0.51277	0.54912	0.86476	0.8912	0.06868	0.12425	0.0604	0.77583	0.77387	0.5903	0.23317	0.87041	0.6655	0.17929	0.80155	0.56231	0.41653	0.61971	0.11947	0.0334	0.14711	0.48967	0.97487
3	0.90392	0.89742	0.57292	1	0.01404	0.75285	0.2274	0.65771	0.68715	0.71601	0.69671	0.0333	0.92431	0.03941	0.10205	0.65316	0.36169	0.17874	0.92743	0.32065	0.20041	0.45123	0.84042	0.39978	0.87607	0.16207	0.29218
4	0.76585	0.13376	0.56733	0.0078	1	0.87903	0.58365	0.391	0.12879	0.35509	0.2207	0.19869	0.81158	0.93355	0.82186	0.62481	0.56529	0.06052	0.96729	0.12873	0.69105	0.05465	0.80887	0.19635	0.0345	0.94067	0.24966
5	0.82765	0.02936	0.84866	0.23433	0.05587	1	0.27269	0.55279	0.90331	0.78674	0.58749	0.20336	0.20484	0.32899	0.82799	0.01596	0.53755	0.66533	0.49043	0.44687	0.6359	0.61087	0.09572	0.03451	0.66057	0.38101	0.03055
6	0.07396	0.72499	0.4295	0.06686	0.09177	0.21732	1	0.16611	0.12018	0.30561	0.20157	0.0547	0.71176	0.72683	0.06199	0.46217	0.34851	0.42626	0.61796	0.0737	0.64524	0.91596	0.72645	0.36626	0.2416	0.06195	0.23829
7	0.48459	0.35229	0.76408	0.3304	0.50325	0.80475	0.6637	1	0.4653	0.74792	0.87445	0.70242	0.37176	0.33099	0.25728	0.99803	0.37497	0.79703	0.96145	0.32401	0.31491	0.86307	0.5334	0.39741	0.03172	0.68958	0.37959
8	0.52287	0.22357	0.92057	0.82355	0.11783	0.1263	0.74712	0.28326	1	0.10888	0.52279	0.501	0.64174	0.06098	0.32209	0.40185	0.95892	0.5887	0.89019	0.36283	0.85956	0.60637	0.42464	0.44068	0.65908	0.80551	0.71788
9	0.35974	0.51556	0.93729	0.93757	0.63891	0.28491	0.32018	0.64321	0.77214	1	0.66079	0.76159	0.68246	0.52755	0.44749	0.3142	0.1943	0.1028	0.43765	0.65892	0.5325	0.90707	0.22248	0.32043	0.04079	0.6036	0.81012
10	0.34962	0.99889	0.22124	0.87341	0.01903	0.12381	0.62937	0.15349	0.42379	0.96281	1	0.06767	0.53271	0.69924	0.19276	0.18916	0.59672	0.68262	0.11019	0.6688	0.6574	0.78569	0.66738	0.25968	0.0467	0.16624	0.67937
11	0.02991	0.25189	0.89275	0.99403	0.98713	0.6276	0.28881	0.46983	0.51511	0.0023	0.50549	1	0.57178	0.81921	0.73542	0.46279	0.68071	0.04967	0.02482	0.05502	0.35162	0.98637	0.57986	0.28804	0.13455	0.12478	0.9326
12	0.26381	0.50281	0.00105	0.29048	0.4348	0.98692	0.33504	0.25619	0.89514	0.25873	0.91669	0.58022	1	0.15387	0.04155	0.74151	0.8805	0.18585	0.90284	0.39487	0.89759	0.25538	0.50577	0.08511	0.55887	0.66723	0.56993
13	0.71003	0.97181	0.56883	0.99782	0.3443	0.39217	0.33912	0.72706	0.32413	0.5115	0.00529	0.92101	0.31868	1	0.98337	0.46768	0.28648	0.75011	0.55955	0.75787	0.7207	0.80979	0.15142	0.94174	0.05075	0.30337	0.57018
14	0.122	0.20781	0.18774	0.66237	0.31702	0.67113	0.03508	0.63344	0.37064	0.11887	0.66737	0.13539	0.60223	0.67332	1	0.7994	0.92942	0.20116	0.96594	0.32604	0.05288	0.61201	0.15998	0.75006	0.73195	0.24432	0.26558
15	0.80043	0.94315	0.51647	0.52262	0.12224	0.54656	0.32675	0.76298	0.96803	0.4455	0.14003	0.27822	0.56769	0.53182	0.34049	1	0.54811	0.71017	0.62218	0.58181	0.59142	0.4568	0.02028	0.42912	0.57807	0.61592	0.2842
16	0.49656	0.32726	0.20661	0.25831	0.10405	0.41374	0.4822	0.42629	0.59438	0.77946	0.73692	0.59893	0.00544	0.58164	0.54933	0.33561	1	0.70955	0.28514	0.91827	0.53224	0.5523	0.24187	0.58731	0.43011	0.34982	0.60253
17	0.1542	0.83675	0.32502	0.684	0.18633	0.3339	0.0169	0.10605	0.65816	0.55917	0.31354	0.76811	0.96638	0.15758	0.07869	0.39457	0.85817	1	0.54255	0.44755	0.11005	0.93822	0.42844	0.82926	0.90052	0.75449	0.05717
18	0.98669	0.35235	0.04011	0.00368	0.59860	0.65297	0.97549	0.78785	0.88387	0.63015	0.44296	0.96751	0.93253	0.23091	0.59949	0.26222	0.002858	0.60694	1	0.03451	0.21888	0.83578	0.04687	0.22564	0.27658	0.35657	0.48643
19	0.42678	0.22445	0.04072	0.17426	0.002704	0.09094	0.00183	0.63972	0.27649	0.58855	0.27237	0.54129	0.54355	0.60062	0.5549	0.68898	0.48205	0.99747	0.86624	1	0.56933	0.90245	0.80245	0.41227	0.53033	0.77199	0.05896
20	0.37217	0.44458	0.84444	0.72427	0.2139	0.60024	0.10163	0.18054	0.23256	0.58815	0.95381	0.68584	0.58119	0.77287	0.24482	0.43022	0.64624	0.85048	0.87945	0.22519	1	0.75572	0.35646	0.42979	0.19172	0.67733	0.34891
21	0.41116	0.28785	0.69917	0.12315	0.6937	0.39122	0.81333	0.91915	0.05582	0.09669	0.88378	0.8823	0.01207	0.00175	0.17674	0.74936	0.51077	0.13446	0.2763	0.51525	0.81609	1	0.22578	0.45513	0.29783	0.37706	0.69912
22	0.32332	0.12074	0.18647	0.38282	0.92356	0.99448	0.72531	0.09549	0.02111	0.5129	0.69675	0.15746	0.4047	0.95825	0.67342	0.94216	0.42859	0.93424	0.06089	0.13727	0.60043	0.28143	1	0.81632	0.08951	0.86619	0.37897
23	0.32938	0.01899	0.11798	0.2518	0.40253	0.08893	0.84877	0.75694	0.01158	0.99453	0.30046	0.64169	0.14585	0.37344	0.35007	0.46382	0.96405	0.56687	0.92367	0.98387	0.57487	0.17498	0.03186	1	0.77736	0.74506	0.90799
24	0.89178	0.21727	0.08358	0.48092	0.1876	0.34632	0.33413	0.51021	0.16245	0.22712	0.33217	0.60744	0.87706	0.21303	0.351	0.86722	0.91714	0.72395	0.63838	0.49541	0.36733	0.15717	0.32918	0.06674	1	0.59451	0.13817
25	0.85387	0.79687	0.411	0.07404	0.26564	0.86724	0.06292	0.65835	0.22545	0.79477	0.39171	0.51401	0.17892	0.79886	0.34141	0.21261	0.95816	0.1708	0.78593	0.71858	0.9083	0.03951	0.21978	0.23363	0.78261	1	0.59531
26	0.7094	0.8486	0.94349	0.89312	0.65169	0.46566	0.65272	0.47742	0.29626	0.62595	0.18008	0.69286	0.43372	0.87573	0.1014	0.57245	0.50883	0.47723	0.70716	0.31074	0.80016	0.494	0.04258	0.95094	0.79185	0.34822	1

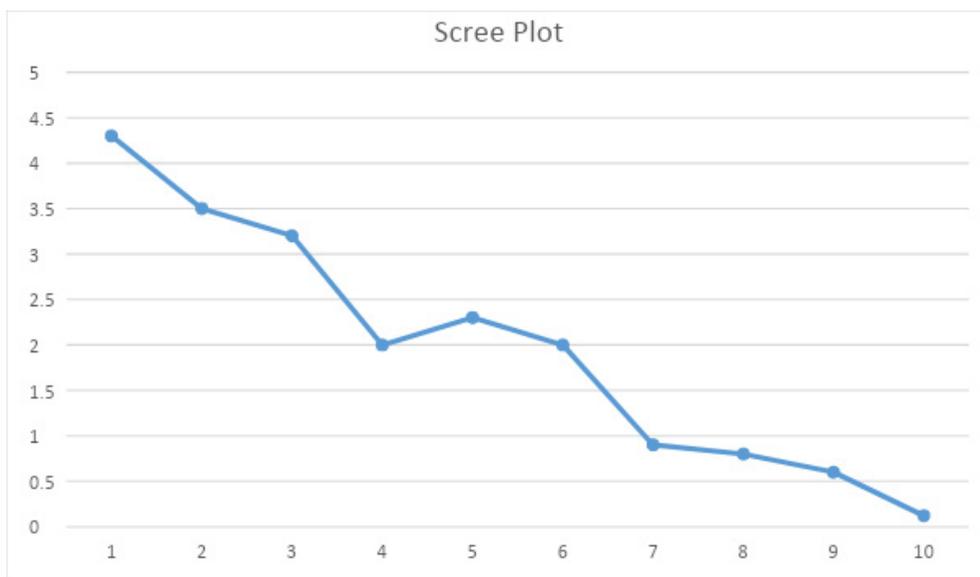
## Testing appropriateness of factor model

In order to ensure that the factor analysis for data is appropriate, we have done two different tests. It is a crucial state for our analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy tests if partial correlations among variables are small. As we can see from the correlation table, our correlation values are pretty small. So, this test is significant. We have also done Bartlett's test of sphericity. It indicates if the factor model is appropriate or not. Both Bartlett's test of Sphericity ( $p < 0.05$ ) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.579) suggests that factor analysis for our data is appropriate.

## Identification of the factor model

The scree plot is used to find out the appropriate number of factors. A scree plot shows the eigenvalues on the y-axis and the number of factors on the x-axis. It always displays a downward curve. The point where the slope of the curve is clearly levelling off (the 'elbow') indicates the number of factors that should be generated by the analysis.

Figure 3



The plot seems to have two inflection points, one at factor 4 and the other at factor 7. For our purposes we choose to keep the factors 7.

## **Rotation of factors**

The factor matrix contains all the coefficients to express all the feature value as a linear combination of factors. Generally what factor analysis does is to determine the best fit between the variables and the latent factors. It looks for the strongest correlations between variables and the latent factor and chooses that Factor 1 is the most influential. Sometimes, the initial solution results in strong correlations of a variable with several factors or in a variable that has no strong correlations with any of the factors. In order to avoid this kind of situation, we do the rotation of factors. Here we have used Varimax with Kaiser Normalization as a rotation method.

From the rotated factor matrix, we can say that Factor 0 has high coefficients for variables gender, age, and educational background, area of living and preferable mass media. Factor 1 mostly includes occupational status, change in residence place, knowledge about COVID-19, media coverage on COVID-19 and media has published reliable and authentic news on COVID-19 and restored media's role on society variables. Factor 2 has high coefficient for satisfaction of media coverage on COVID-19, helpfulness of media content, frequent update rate of on COVID-19, media's role in influencing and forming and influencing people's attitude and rational decision making regarding COVID-19.

Factor 3 has high coefficients for variables for the news websites published more updated news on COVID-19 than mainstream media (TV, Radio & Newspaper), media has played a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes on COVID and how to prepare for it, media has helped in building public awareness on COVID-19 among the different classes of peoples and necessary content on mainstream media. Factor 4 includes news media that have exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks associated with the virus, effect of mental state reading newspapers, trust on social media, influence of social media vs mainstream media, similarly factor 5 consists of media's freedom, political bias, misleading information presentation. The last factor, factor 6 includes the effects of presence of international media, understanding of present state of impact, and judgmental steps or statements on other Countries situations.

Table 4

## Loading factors

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
0	0.464618	0.707047	0.039303	0.861328	0.692063	0.824217	0.047223
1	0.410561	0.621589	0.572768	0.122828	0.401186	0.491053	0.791706
2	0.89706	0.983824	0.473899	0.460742	0.113773	0.058026	0.227585
3	0.661501	0.736824	0.031446	0.098833	0.316296	0.666145	0.519109
4	0.25881	0.236544	0.896183	0.503036	0.87104	0.589475	0.116984
5	0.904341	0.994994	0.997488	0.987198	0.194321	0.257321	0.02204
6	0.624053	0.118268	0.905628	0.438695	0.426974	0.087735	0.886442
7	0.55667	0.585098	0.641983	0.3625	0.592023	0.325383	0.083928
8	0.761033	0.823802	0.835255	0.005388	0.229137	0.886851	0.705277
9	0.56329	0.750393	0.938874	0.808383	0.881313	0.67105	0.882083
10	0.228153	0.309354	0.854447	0.07619	0.643704	0.315939	0.592026
11	0.59861	0.545791	0.181897	0.186534	0.745354	0.579655	0.660058
12	0.266234	0.3913	0.499589	0.068056	0.169173	0.081578	0.478332
13	0.284914	0.80185	0.163534	0.800998	0.309285	0.466925	0.76238
14	0.117698	0.840751	0.268486	0.619385	0.411368	0.476206	0.58002
15	0.538985	0.310418	0.199153	0.218614	0.853709	0.658694	0.830359
16	0.039963	0.091965	0.600275	0.811158	0.55083	0.769772	0.61263
17	0.425031	0.779224	0.466699	0.166077	0.570881	0.649457	0.627798
18	0.494754	0.255134	0.839512	0.081042	0.946872	0.977871	0.640088
19	0.947938	0.476544	0.510779	0.278379	0.509475	0.313427	0.519749
20	0.194208	0.114708	0.675572	0.016767	0.121426	0.103828	0.695858
21	0.661725	0.096717	0.60016	0.123308	0.117602	0.685178	0.088468
22	0.456679	0.69114	0.684697	0.413191	0.115363	0.403036	0.997365
23	0.723686	0.935952	0.690756	0.744369	0.089407	0.682228	0.634916
24	0.752977	0.104511	0.863222	0.202238	0.868824	0.302118	0.401282
25	0.416903	0.417635	0.706305	0.657853	0.495606	0.629733	0.497094
26	0.208381	0.233181	0.640189	0.525273	0.084899	0.431994	0.221197

These factors are helpful for understanding the inner correlation among the variables. Factor 0 indicates Personal background, Factor 1 indicates Current state, and Factor 2 suggests effects in decision making. Factor 3 can be identified as perception about media, Factor 4 includes Psychological state affected by media, Factor 5 is Media freedom and Factor 6 is having the variables of Views towards other countries. We can now construct a structural equation model to understand the dynamics among these factors.

### Structural equation model (SEM)

Structural equation modelling is one of the most popular methodologies in quantitative social data analytics. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a methodology for representing, estimating, and testing a network of relationships between variables both measured variables and latent constructs. It also estimates both the strength of each relationship and the overall accuracy of the model.

We need to do confirmatory factor analysis to verify that the measurement model is consistent for SEM. We have developed the factors in the previous section. As we have reached confidence in our measurement model, our structural model is constructed by representing all of the factors.

Table 5

Relationship			Estimate	S.E.	P-value
Factor 0		Factor 3	.061	.015	.005
Factor 1		Factor 3	-.189	.030	<i>&lt; 0.001</i>
Factor 3		Factor 4	-.0.050	.026	<i>0.060</i>
Factor 3		Factor 5	.306	.237	.202
Factor 2		Factor 3	-.073	.048	.133
Factor 6		Factor 3	-1.686	.487	<i>&lt; 0.001</i>
Factor 0		Factor 5	.109	.379	.202

From the table, we can see that Personal background, current state and effects in decision making has strong relationship regarding media perception. On the other hand, media perception has direct relation with media freedom. Views towards other countries also regulated the perception towards media perception. Factor three that includes variables for the news websites published more updated news on COVID-19 than mainstream media (TV, Radio & Newspaper), media has played a significant role in forming and influencing people’s attitudes on COVID and how to prepare for it, media has helped in building public awareness on COVID-19 among the different classes of peoples and necessary content on mainstream media influences Factor four which includes that news media that have exaggerated fear, anxiety and risks associated with the virus, effect of mental state reading newspapers, trust on social media, influence of social media vs mainstream media.

## **Limitations**

Different study methods have different strengths and weaknesses. At this study, 'Google Form' platform was used to customize and collect data. Due to COVID-19 Pandemic we were unable to conduct a door to door survey and face-to-face interviews. The Purposive sampling technique was applied to distribute survey questionnaires through the networks of the researchers. Different online platforms were used as convenient channels to gather information. As a result, underprivileged or vulnerable groups may not have been able to join the survey.

A total (n=392) joined this online survey. Though there were different professionals who participated in the survey, the sample of the study was mostly dominated by male participants. The 392 respondents were coming from different geographical locations, educational attainment, professions, ages, religions and living with urban & rural areas.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The study was conducted to explore the public perception of the media's role during COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. The research question posed is what are the various strategies and levels of influences that impact on the Bangladeshi public's information seeking and their ability to deal with the challenges of infodemic amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Media played a vital role in creating a public perception through news coverage. In this case study, the media has played the role of primary gatekeeper of information and knowledge for the common people and creates a relationship between COVID-19 media content and public perception. Audience perception had been created after consuming the different types of news. People made important decisions influenced by media news or information during COVID-19 in Bangladesh.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people consumed a significant number of various types of news content from different online news portals and social media channels for getting the latest updated information. A large number of people also consumed electronic media as sources of information and news of COVID-19. The media organizations were more active in covering news during COVID-19 than before the virus hit in Bangladesh. After following the news outlets respondents understood the present scenario and impact of COVID-19 in the country. Though people frequently got more updated news from online news portals than mainstream media, still maximum respondents showed their trust in mainstream media as a credible news source. The media outlets produced more interactive content like audio-visual and breaking news that grabbed people's attention and helped to form their perception towards the

media's role. A high number of respondents believed that during the pandemic their overall news consumption rate increased. To get more information and real-time updates news, an impressive number of respondents visited more frequently news portals and social media channels than before the outbreak of Pandemic. The majority of respondents agreed that the media provided authentic and reliable news that influenced people's attitude on COVID-19 and increased knowledge of preventive public health measures.

To achieve the final objective of this study which was to find out the interplay and relationship between the COVID-19 media content and public perception. The results revealed that media coverage affects the public perception. Media provided various content which is related to COVID-19 information, update news and awareness related messages. This is exactly like how the news media were responsible for making up people's minds, influenced and motivated them to make decisions during COVID-19. Media positively helped people taking preventive health issues, rational thinking, increasing awareness on COVID-19 in detail, identifying the factors influencing decisions. The media has managed creating a positive role by objectively delivering information on COVID-19 because of publishing frequently updated news, different types of contents, awareness related online campaigns, and sharing preventive health information. gender and educational attainment also indicated a significant connection between public perception and media's role during COVID-19.

In terms of how this study's results compare to previous academic research, there are some similarities and differences. Given the respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards the mass media and the content, it departs from journalists' self-perceived idealised Western understanding of authenticity, accountability and autonomy (Hayes et al., 2007). In fact, it more closely follows Mellado's (2015) role of loyal facilitator (to the authorities). The result has been a displacement in the relational interactions between journalists and their audiences, which has been noted in previous research (Vos et al., 2019). However, as noted by Sadaf (2011), media can still play a role in influencing audiences and society. This is the case, given the respondents answers on this matter. This is seen in this instance within the context of the pandemic crisis in this case study, the mass media audience is not passive consumer of the larger dynamics of social and institutional structure, but also an active participant in the events covered and their interpretation. This has clear implications in this study, especially during a period of the simultaneous challenges of information overload and informational uncertainty. This influences trust, an important and key element, during informational uncertainty, which also prompts information seeking during periods of elevated risk.

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