Crisis Communication: Role of Audio Visual Media in times of Disaster

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Abstract:

Audio Visual Media are the very core of Mass Communication. Written word, pictures, videos, voices songs etc. contribute to tools for communicating with masses. With the passage of time, Audio Visual media has gained far more relevance in the mass communication domain. With Television, computers and then internet and digital platforms revolutionising the communication sector, there are more and more forms of Audio as well as visual forms of media constantly bombarding informational and emotional material to consumers. What was once a tool to spread awareness, has now digressed to becoming a catalyst to align people to specific ideologies.

In times of Crisis, mass communication plays a critical role in making or breaking the society. Audio visual media has played a crucial role in ensuring credibility of information spread through relevant images, interviews and videos. But ever since digital platforms have come into common practice, credibility of information has been heavily compromised. With editing or morphing images and videos, the new trend is to use manipulated Audio Visual information to spread rumors and misinformation, to suit one's propaganda.

This research intends to delve into this situation and try to analyse the roots of this problem. Through qualitative case study based research, this study intends to understand the complexity and try to propose a suitable solution to bring the credibility of Audio Visual media back in Mass Communication.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Audio Visual Media, Photojournalism, Broadcast Journalism, Crisis Management, Eye witness news, Misinformation

Introduction:

We are living in an age of communication. From the times when humans first realised that interpersonal communication can be a brilliant tool for survival, communication has only seen an upward trend in newer developments. What started off as a use of gestures for signalling presence of threat and use of signs for hunting together, has ended up today, as the base for various art forms in different media. The advent is so profound that in today's generation, one does not find any person who is constantly not engaged with some digital communication tool.

In the modern age, mass communication has gained a tremendous drive. When paper was first invented, it led to the revolution of what we today know as mass communication. Until writing was invented, the main tool for mass communication was the spoken word. Sermons by priests and announcements by kings were some of the initial forms of mass communication. As civilizations became more modern, journalism came in and news started getting written. Making people aware of happenings around them in written form became an important aspect of day to day life. As times became more turbulent, journalism and newspapers became catalyst to bringing together in times of war. Many journalists are credited with their role in awakening people during freedom struggle of different nations. Talking about Indian freedom struggle*,* During British rule, we learned two things, one King and one language for official rd communication (i.e. English). In addition to this British Rule, it brought these provisions together through administration, law, economical decisions, army, post, railway, roads, currency, etc. Even they treated Hindu, Muslim, Shikh, Jains, Parsi, Buddha, Rajput, all religions and casts with same justice and equality. In short, there are only two classes in India, i.e. rural and citizen with salvation. This has helped us (Indians) to come together and have given us the opportunity to resolve our differences and to think as one Nation. All the people from different religions or casts must come together and to think about their progress. Tilak mentioned that religion, border, language and back history are not the only parameters for building a nation though they help for crystallizing the idea of Nation. (Tilak & Tilak, 2019)

With print journalism gaining more impetus, a challenge that was encountered was that budding journalists would write unverified news and biased opinions to sensationalise their story and gain fame. During these times, photography and television were the new inventions of great prominence. Incorporating visual evidence with the written word suddenly became a possibility. As expected, photojournalism gained popularity and images started serving evidence and credibility to the written material. Photographs were being used in newspapers all over the world by the 1920s and they remain a crucial part of reporting today, even in many Muslim countries where figurative imagery is discouraged. The international news agencies each day distribute photos by photographers native to a great variety of countries to newspapers published in many languages and read by people of dramatically different cultures. (Kim & Kelly, 2008)

As technology advanced, Television came in and along with it came the new phenomenon of broadcasting. This gave rise to a very modernised concept of News channels and live

broadcasting of news. Promptness of presenting the day to day happenings became the need of the hour and suddenly the whole world was competing to give video images as quickly as possible. Breaking news became the common term across news platforms and they were supported by evidence of live videos which were as good as real. Along with the rise in popularity has come an increasing amount of comment, both pro and con, about Eyewitness News. In the short history of television journalism, few developments have caused so much controversy and illustrated the underlying problems of television news so vividly. No less an oracle than Marshall McLuhan has come out in favor of the concept, calling Eyewitness News the first format to be designed for TV. "The new fact of TV," says McLuhan, "is that 'You are there' and 'They are there.'" The newspaper reader is a* spectator but, the TV public is "part of the action." (Dominick, Wurtzel, & Lometti, 1975)

When internet took over, new domains were established for spreading information. But there was something unique about the web based domain. Until now all journalism was monitored. There were press control agencies in every country to ensure credibility of information in newspapers and broadcasting governing agencies to scrutinise video news content. And since there was a predefined procedure to set up a news agency and a TV news channel, there was always definite action that could be taken against new spreading agencies in cases of violation of norms set by governments. But with the internet, it was a challenge like never before. Since the hosting of websites and web based news channels was virtual, it was difficult to trace down culprits and ensure that all information has a bare minimum credibility. This results in a large amount of misinformation being available on these domains, making people wonder what the reality, actually is?

Crisis Communication

In times of crisis and disaster, proper credible communication becomes vital. when situations are inherently capable of creating panic, proper communication can ensure pacification of the general public. it can also lead to creative and highly productive solutions of overcoming the crisis. On the flip side, misinformation being spread in such critical times can have unimaginable impact and can lead to an even larger disaster. Despite the growing literature on crisis management and the well developed research on organizational legitimacy, the relationship between crisis and legitimacy is unclear. Seeger et al. (1998) state that &dquo;substantial research will be required before a clear relationship is established between legitimacy and successful crisis management&dquo; (p. 258). The current investigation

analyzes the relationship between legitimacy and crisis management. The analysis synthesizes three areas of theory and research to do so: organizational legitimacy, crisis management, and niche-width theory. The work on crisis management and organizational legitimacy is combined to examine the organizational communication processes that occur during crises of legitimacy. Niche-width theory is also included in order to investigate any effects that organizational structure may have on legitimacy. (Massey, 2001)

Although the whole objective of introducing audio visual medium to journalism and news reporting was to add to authenticity and credibility of the news story, it has been observed over a span of time that in testing times, there has been a deliberation to create misinformation and spreading it across modern domains for ulterior interests. Political parties, pressure groups, and even individuals aligned with specific thoughts and inclinations have been observed to deliberately create misinformation and spread it through various new media channels to create a hypothetical panic and thereby forcing people to look for urgent solutions, which are then provided by these very sources of misinformation. In this way, a market of misinformation consumers is created and panic is used as a tool to sell solutions, alternate products, alternate ideologies and, most shockingly, alternate governments.

Role of Modern Technology in Communication during Crisis

Modern technology has been a key catalyst in creating communication more accessible and speedier to reach its end consumer. In times of calamities and crisis, especially since the times of privatisation of broadcast channels, technology has been a key driver in ensuring speed of communication. It has also played a role in increasing the scope of rescue and reform work that can be done to avert the crisis. One such recent example is the role Google played in rescue works during floods in some of the parts of South India like Chennai and Kerala. Utility of modern technologies like navigation and social media information enabled rescue workers to locate people stuck in some of the most remote but adversely affected area, and lives could be saved and damages could be reduced.

In another case, (Baker, 2011)Japan's earthquake started at 2.46 p.m. on 11 March 2011, in the South Kanto area, which includes Miyagi, Fukushima, Iwate and northern Ibaraki as well as Tokyo, Ibaraki and Chiba. Immediately after the earthquake, both fixed and mobile telephone connections were interrupted, and people lost the immediate means to communicate with their family members, friends and acquaintances. Aftershocks continued for more than a month, and the radiation leakage from nuclear power plants became a big

issue worldwide. Two days after the earthquake (13 March 2011), there was a warning of an explosion at the first Fukushima nuclear power plant, and the employees were exposed to radiation. Despite these ongoing events, Japanese people, while fearful, returned to their daily lives within a week. Twitter broke the news about the earthquake approximately 20 minutes before the mainstream media (http://estima.wordpress. com/2011/04/02/2261). After official reports by the mainstream media, people engaged in personal communication mainly through social media. (Cho, Jung, & Park, 2013)

One of the recent phenomenon observed to be used by many governments to avoid spreading of misinformation over web based audio visual platforms, is the possibility of shutting down internet in politically and socially sensitive areas and situations. On occassions of pre-empting riots, a lot of governing bodies have resorted to shutting down internet to curb the flow of misinformation as tracking down the source of a fake piece of information in the web based arena is extremely difficult and time consuming. This results in possible large scale damage if the bit of fake information spreads. To avoid this, as a safety measure, many governments end up creating a sort of data curfew by blocking spread of all information on the internet for a specified period. While on one end, this may help in curbing some of the nuisance, it also blocks innocent users from basic communication with their near and dear ones in sensitive zones. In an age when the society is used to 4G technology features such as Voice calling and video calling, shutting down internet can end up having more dire effects to the psychology of people than reformative effects.

  New social media appeared to play a key role in organising the riots with smart phones giving those with access to these technologies the power to network socially and to incite collective disorder. Facebook and the Blackberry Messenger service were the main mediums used to organise the English riots, while the social networking site, Twitter, displayed regular reports and updates of the incidents of a credible and false nature. The effectiveness of social media was particularly apparent in London where rioting extended to over thirty locations on 8 August 2011. While the rioting emerged from a political protest in Tottenham in 'real' time and space, its development across London and other cities in England, such as Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Liverpool and Gloucester, was facilitated by new social media as an effective form of social networking. Here, social media functioned to recruit rioters by providing the ability for Internet users to connect with mass audiences using social networking to communicate their messages. Yet, while social media can help to explain the speed and the capacity to orchestrate riots in many cities across England, social media cannot

account for the failure of attempts to organise riots via social networking sites in areas, such as, Plymouth in southwest England, and Northwich in northwest England. Or, as said another way, while new social media contributed to the form and effect of the riots, http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/4/21.html 2 02/12/2011 they were not the initial cause of the civic unrest – a Blackberry handset does not cause one to riot, just as being a member of Twitter or Facebook does not make one more susceptible to violence (a point further demonstrated by the role of new social media as a form of resistance to the riots, as a police tactic to locate those responsible for the unrest, and in the 'clean up' operations that took place in areas across England affected by the riots – Baker, 2012). Consequently, to blame technology as the cause of the riots is limited. Riots have occurred at regular intervals in modern Britain long before these technological innovations, and while new social media facilitates social networking in diverse temporal and spatial boundaries, it is a facilitator rather than the underlying cause of collective action. Here, it suggested that attempts to understand the causes of the recent riots must recognise that emotions play a crucial role in motivating thought and action. (Baker, 2011)

Methodology:

While most of the research has been through qualitative literature review, specific case studies have been done to pursue different domains of the relevance of audio visual media in crisis communication. Case studies have been deliberately kept universal to check the uniformity of the challenges posed by current day audio visual formats in times of crisis as well as the prospective solutions presented for similar crisis situations.

It can be observed based on the examples of India, Japan, and Britain, that while human responses to technology based input in times of crisis is quite consistent across geographies. It can also be observed that the power of governing authorities is also similar to a major extent in dealing with audio visual new media. With the advent of web hosted video and picture editing software like Filmora and Wevideo, it becomes further easier for misinformation creators to get the tools to morph images and videos they need to create what is commonly called today as "Fake News".

Conclusion:

Based on the above study it can be fairly concluded that audio visual media is not just the most popular form of mass communication, it has become the staple form of information

consumption. With such widespread popularity and utility, ensuring completely secure, credible and legitimate information in times of crisis. At any point in time, a looming crisis can be averted through secure and credible communication, while rumours and misinformation can lead to a larger scope of damage.

In such scenarios, formalised education in this domain at initials levels of education can help budding information creators to realise the responsibility of every audio visual information they create to spread. It will also make these creators a little averse to the risk of damage that can be caused by that one bit of misinformation. To sum it up, it is time to go back to the roots and revise why mass communication came into existence so that its abuse can be minimised.

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