

SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATION DURING THE OUTBREAK OF PANDEMIC TOWARDS COMMUNITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY COVID-19 AND SPANISH FLU (H1N1)

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Abstract

Pandemic has caused many of the communities affected in their daily lives. This is not limit to only the ways of doing things but also in a form of communication. It forces communities specifically to response different ways to suit the current environment. Traditionally, in the context of education, classes were conducted in physical face-to-face and presently it was conducted virtually. Due to this, many are struggling to adopt with the new norms practiced among the community. Many sectors are also affected in ways of communication to perform daily tasks. Thus, the present study highlighted a reviews of literature studies based on secondary data to seek further significance of communication during the attach of pandemic comparing from present and previous studies. The two pandemic comparisons made was between Spanish Flu in 1918 also known as H1N1 flu pandemic which killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide, including an estimated 675,000 people in the United States. Meanwhile, the current pandemic namely Covid-19, another stronger virus that has killed 2,682,258 worldwide as at 17th March 2021. Understanding its significance changing the ways of communities communicating with the limitation due to virus will help researcher as well as readers to understand the importance of adopting the present communication in ensuring the relevancy of communication in the era of 21st century with the involvement of pandemic situations.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Spanish Flu (H1N1), pandemic, Communication, Communities*

1.0 Introduction

Every major crisis impacted countries in this world that also impacted humans who live in it. Therefore, respective leaders developed guidelines to safeguard and to overcome crisis. However, with the new crisis that is currently plaguing the world in the form of the Covid-19 Pandemic, some countries are replicating the same mistakes similar to previous pandemic as seen in Figure 1 with a previous plague being the Spanish Flu (H1N1) as reference. Figure 1 shows the figure relating to pandemic crises affected, a comparative study between previous pandemic Spanish Flu (H1N1) in 1918 and Covid-19 Pandemic in year 2020 attacking communities worldwide.

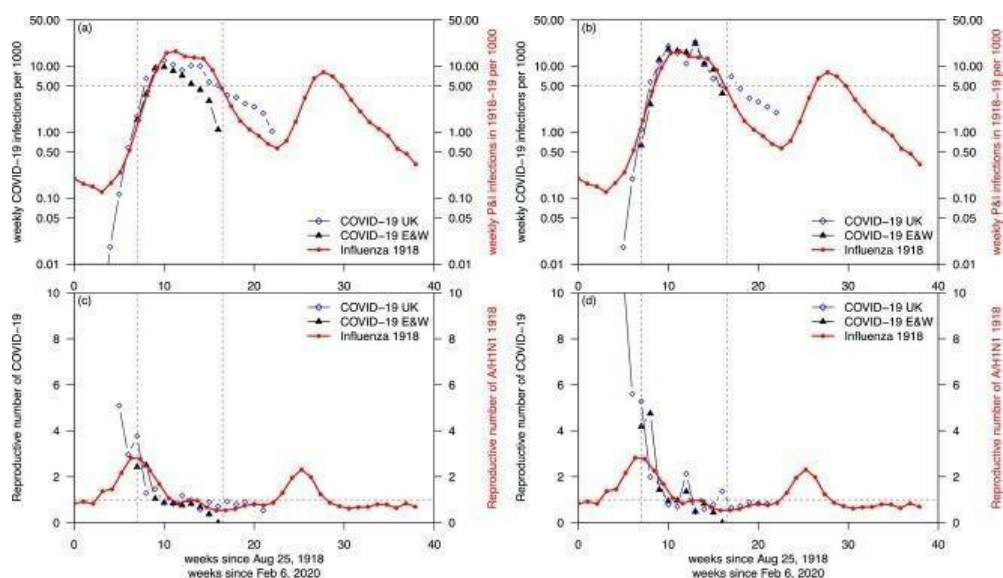


Figure 1. Comparisons of COVID-19 and A/H1N1 1918 [1]

Thus, the objective of this paper is to review previous human attempts to overcome a pandemic event through the use of communication and compare them to current attempts and identify the changes and differences between the two pandemics. As it is believed that the role of the communication media is vital to the aspect of combatting the virus because with the Covid-19 pandemic, the communication technology is currently being used to help as well as worsen the state of the pandemic in certain countries. Previous study explained on the preventive measures on physical means from an individual standpoint and overlooked on the usage and advantages of communication over a large group of communities. Therefore, the present study intends to provide an insight on how the use of communication during the pandemic will help to reduce the spread of the pandemic and overcome it to a certain degree as well as to serve documentation of human attempts in containing the pandemic for future research.

The present paper is divided into multiple sections. The first section exploring the understanding on Spanish Flu (H1N1) as well as its communication used during the hit. Meanwhile, the second section will be the understanding of situation of Covid-19 and communication practices used during the pandemic. Additionally, the third section comprised of both pandemic and communication roles during the situation.

Previous studies found in google scholar searches relating to these two pandemic (1) The Spanish Flu (H1N1) Pandemic and (2) Covid-19 are as per table 1: -

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TABLE 1

Summary of Studies conducted relating to keywords such as “Spanish Flu and Media Communication” and “Covid-19 and Media Communication”

Year Published	Spanish Flu (H1N1)	Year Published	Covid-19
2000 -2005	16,300	2000- Present	42,500
2006 -2010	16,600		
2011 -2015	17,700		
2016 -2020	17,400		

Searches found that numbers of studies discussed on Spanish Flu and media communication from year 2000 – 2005 are more than 16,000 studies every five years. Surprisingly, the comparison of the previous experience has been done through all related studies. This has been proven with the results from 2016 – 2020 with more than 17,000 studies was conducted relating to that topic. While recent studies on Covid-19 with the relation of media communication, result shows numbers of studies are up to more than 40,000 in less than two years. This reflected with the technology advancement in collecting information’s and fast media such as social media [2].

2.0 The Spanish Flu (H1N1) Pandemic

The Spanish Flu (H1N1) was a pandemic occurred during early 20th century, lasted from 1918 to 1920. It infected 500 million people which about a third of the world's population at the time in four successive waves [3]; [4]; [5]. The Spanish Flu (H1N1) was recorded to be the most dangerous and deadliest pandemic that plagued the 20th century with a death toll numbering up to 50 million and as high as 100 million.

Spanish flu (H1N1) started on March 4th, 1918 the first infection reported was from an army cook. After few days another 522 cases were reported amongst the men within the regiment [6]. This later extended and more people was infected and eventually spread to other countries outside of the United States. Its biggest hit and impact happened in Spain as a neutral and green areas that is not affected by the World War. This is also due to the wartime news blackouts which allows it easier for the virus to spread within the country. The name “Spanish Flu” was given due to the impact it had on the country and how the news and media spread awareness of the pandemic using the country of Spain. Many at the time believed that Spain was origin of the pandemic. The Spanish flu eventually end at the time of Summer 1919 and started to reduce new cases with low numbers of communities infected due to the development of influenza vaccines [7].

The media played a major role during the pandemic in better and worst-case scenarios. The pandemic hits the world during its initial stage and its effects as well as the emergence of the virus was censored even outright blocked from being published in any news media outlets at that time due to the ongoing World War [8]. The Illustrated London News which was a Great Britain newspaper printed on its paper “so mild as to show that the original virus is becoming attenuated by frequent transmission.” which downplays the virus even more [9]. During the Spanish flu spread, in order to contained communication relating to the spread. British news twisted and reported false report and mentioned the Prime Minister had an extended stay due to chilling storms. News reported was not involving a direct message relating to flu. These actions taken, to prevent panic among communities in a country. Besides, some countries tried to warn their citizens and possibly the world regarding the flu, but it was shut by news editors.

Further examples taken from Philadelphia’s newspaper on editors refusing doctors warnings, stating that it was unsafe and would risk spreading the flu. The news was later declined by editors to print those articles doctor letters regarding the flu [10]. The only country at the time that spread the awareness of the flu towards its citizens and the world at the time was the country of Spain. Spain was

considered a non-combatant country and thus it was not required to abate the fallacy that the other nation had participated in the war.

3.0 The Covid-19 Pandemic

The announcement made by World Health Organization (WHO) reported on new pandemic, Covid-19 rise that affecting people's lives. The present study was conducted during the second to third waves since its visible end of 2019 in Malaysia. The virus originated from Wuhan's own Huanan seafood wholesale market which sold live animals. However, the animals sold at the market was not the cause of the virus but instead was merely the stage where the virus spreads. Eventually the virus spread further and further from Wuhan to other countries from human-to-human interaction. Currently as of 21 November 2020 almost a whole year after the first initial awareness of the virus, there are a total 55.6 million people infected while 1.3 million people have died due to the virus. It has affected every nation and has caused most nations to go into lockdown. Some countries however have been able to keep the transmission of the virus in check while some countries are not doing so well. This is because some countries have been able to manage their citizens with providing information regarding the virus as well as instruct the citizens to follow proper procedures to keep the virus from spreading. Such examples of countries are Australia and Greenland with Australia having up to at most 20 new cases daily and Greenland having 0 new cases since May 24. There are since countries such as the United States that are doing poorly in their management of Covid-19 and as such the United States is the worst country with a total number of 12 million cases and 100 thousand new cases daily.

Despite, Spanish Flu, the media plays a major role in handling the Covid-19 pandemic for better or for worse. With the advancement of current technology, it is now possible to transmit information from one side of the planet to the other side easily, thus receiving the news of the virus and its ongoing spread is much easier to be received during its early stages. In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) received information regarding the early cases and symptoms of the Covid-19 virus from China and has already taken steps to prevent its outbreak. However, the news media tasked with reporting such an outbreak took its time to relay such information regarding the virus's danger as mentioned "In general, news trends peak and wane, according to the confirmed cases during other infectious disease outbreak periods; however, in some cases, the mass media cannot capture the outbreak in time and, therefore, fails to become the leading indicator" [11].

This coupled with misinformation and rumours being spread through social media causes the outbreak to become more widespread. Misinformation such as fake reports of cases being spread as well as fake cures such as "drinking X number of waters" and the selling of fake cures such as Frank Ludlow a man from the city of London that is selling fake Covid-19 cure kits to the United States. The government themselves in this task of spreading information regarding the pandemic has accomplished their tasks in certain countries. Countries such as Australia have been able to manage their Covid-19 cases very well. This is possible due to the effort of the government and their separate ministers working together to keep the spread of the pandemic in check. Such examples, being that they are able to provide a daily news coverage of new cases as well as provide information of hazard zones that their citizens should avoid "Both ABC and SBS fulfil their public service mission by providing transparent, objective and diverse coverage of the coronavirus crisis, in radio and TV programmes as well as via social media and various apps." [12].

On the other side of the spectrum, countries such as America and the United Kingdom are doing poorly in their management of the pandemic. The United States government and their media have been downplaying the virus constantly and its lethality as mentioned within an article by Juana Summers on npr.org where the article creates the timeline of each subsequent notable event where the President is downplaying the virus such as on 3rd April 2020 Donald J Trump states to the public regarding the CDC's statement about wearing masks "You can do it. You don't have to do it. I'm

choosing not to do it, but some people may want to do it, and that's OK. It may be good. Probably will. They're making a recommendation. It's only a recommendation," Trump said. This is coupled with the news preferring to cover other news such as the protests as well as the Presidential Election which on their own are already dividing the country which makes it harder for any government to keep the pandemic under control.

4.0 Methodology

The present study was conducted through a systematic review technique which uses keywords search “Covid-19 and communication” and “Spanish Flu (H1N1) and communication”. Search has been conducted in journal article platforms such as Google scholar, ProQuest and online websites. Review was further entailed the keyword on communication used during war relating to Spanish Flu (H1N1) compared to recent pandemic Covid-19. Further section shows the findings of the review process in understanding the communication comparisons used towards Public relating to Spanish Flu (H1N1) and Covid-19 Pandemic through newspaper and social media.

5.0 Findings

Communication Comparison during Pandemic Spanish Flu (H1N1) and Covid-19

Based on the information gathered regarding the two pandemic that has happened in human history. The role of the media has played a major role in both pandemics in that the media is the main factor for reporting as well as informing the public regarding the pandemic which in turn would allow the general public to be prepared of the pandemic and also allows the pandemic to be kept under control as an early detection warning. However, in both pandemics there are problems and obstacles that cause the pandemic to spiral out of control and would cause the infection of the virus to spread widely. This problem is also tied with the role of the media in both pandemics.

During the Spanish Flu, media technology is not as advanced as during the Covid - 19 era and thus information regarding the pandemic was slow to be transmitted to people in power who at the time held the power to spread its awareness as most media outlets at the time was controlled by the government and is meant for military use. This coupled with a widespread censorship of information due to the ongoing World War that limits the spread of critical information such as the pandemic which would affect soldier morale in the battlefield made it even worse in combating the news about the pandemic in its initial stages. However, Spain was able to spread awareness of the news and thus other countries were able to take precaution against the virus and create guidelines and safeguards for their citizens to follow to prevent further spreading of the virus. Table 1 explains the comparative study on communication use during both pandemic now and then.

TABLE 2

Summary of Communication Comparisons to Public on Spanish Flu (H1N1) and Covid-19 Pandemic Through Newspaper and Social Media.

Pandemic	News Reported	News elements	Source
Spanish flu (H1N1)	From press release to news. Unlike the 55 matched press releases with only 40% containing emotion appeals, 66.7% (38) of the 57 matching news stories use an emotion appeal, compared to 19 stories (33.3%) that do not. The most prevalent emotion appeal in the 38 news stories is reassurance (22 or 57.9%), followed by satisfaction	News release contains of emotional appeals led to reassurance among the audience.	[13]

	<p>(12 or 31.6%), anger (2 or 5.3%), fear (1 or 2.6%), and sadness (1 or 2.6%).</p> <p>Many press releases without emotion appeals morphed into stories with emotion appeals, in particular reassurance. The press release “Update on Mexican Swine Influenza” (April 30, 2009) does not have any emotion appeal, but its two corresponding news stories, “Orange Alert” and “Hospitals and Clinics Leave Nothing to Chance” (May 1, 2009), reassure readers by emphasizing the measures taken to contain H1N1.</p>		
	<p>H1N1 was the leading health story for eight of 24 weeks and was in the top 5 for 20 weeks. 353 news items were identified, yielding 3086 statements for analysis, with 63.4% related to the seriousness of the situation, 12.9% providing advice for viewers and 23.6% involving assurances from government. Coverage focused on infection/mortality rates, the spread of the virus, the need for public calm, the vulnerability of particular groups, direct and indirect advice for viewers, and government reassurances about effective management.</p>	<p>Highlighting the seriousness of the pandemic followed by advice and reassurance from government has led to reassurance on effective management.</p>	[14]
	<p>Spanish media therefore merely reported the news that was being suppressed in Britain, Germany, France and other countries where it could conceivably have saved many lives. In Spain, the disease was known at the time as “French Flu”</p>	<p>Highlighting the country initiative to save more lives.</p>	[15]
Covid-19	<p>Fake news and COVID-19: modelling the predictors of fake news sharing among social media users.</p> <p>Social media, fake news, and COVID-19. Misinformation on social media has fuelled panic regarding the COVID-19.</p>	<p>Fake news Distribution through social media led to misinformation and panic among the viewers.</p>	[16]; [17]
	<p>Newspaper coverage is highly politicized, network news coverage somewhat less so, and both newspaper and network news coverage are highly polarized. We find that politicians appear in newspaper coverage more frequently than scientists, whereas politicians and scientists are more equally featured in network news.</p>	<p>Information distribution been politicized led to polarisation towards viewers attitude.</p>	[18]

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	We suggest that the high degree of politicization and polarization in initial COVID-19 coverage may have contributed to polarization in U.S. COVID-19 attitudes.		
	Novel coronavirus,” “China coronavirus,” “COVID-19,” “2019-nCoV,” and “SARS-COV-2” were the top infodemic and scientific COVID-19 terms trending in Italy. The top five searches related to health were “face masks,” “amuchina” (disinfectant), “symptoms of the novel coronavirus,” “health bulletin,” and “vaccines for coronavirus.” The regions of Umbria and Basilicata recorded a high number of infodemic monikers (APC weighted total >140).	Misinformation was widely circulated in the Campania region, and racism-related information was widespread in Umbria and Basilicata.	[19]

In comparison with the Covid-19 pandemic. Media technology has advanced further and thus information is able to be transmitted much more quickly compared to the Spanish Flu. There was no ongoing major event that prevented the transmission of important news to other countries which allows them to create safeguards and guidelines for their citizens. This allows the citizens and the government to keep control of the pandemic within their countries such as Australia and Greenland. However, certain countries are still repeating the same mistakes from the Spanish Flu such as downplaying the virus due to an ongoing major event within the country and ignoring the dangers of the pandemic in its early stages and thus is now going through major problems in controlling the pandemic within its country as exemplified with the United States. It supported with previous study conducted in Table 2 explains on fake news and misinformation led towards panic among the citizen. In addition,

However, the comparison between the two pandemics were a difference in technology as well as knowledge regarding viruses as during the era of the Spanish Flu the study of virology was very limited. The government as well during the time of the Spanish flu was focused onto the war effort and as such the health and wellbeing of the citizens within America was limited to state governors as stated in an interview by a CNN reporter “At the time, there were no federal health agencies such as the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention or the National Institutes of Health. The government's role was limited to war, collecting taxes, and making federal law,” [20]. Comparing that to the current pandemic with Covid-19, the government has more resources as well as increased knowledge towards virology as well as governmental institutions such as the Centre of Disease Control which manages viruses and diseases in the country and yet they are doing much worse compared to the Spanish Flu pandemic. Thus, there is a difference between the two pandemics in that the Spanish Flu was devastating because of a number of factors such as limited knowledge and technology as well as the ongoing war which delayed the spread of the news. The era where the Covid-19 pandemic has better technology and knowledge which has made it easier for countries to combat its spread which is much better than the Spanish Flu. However, the country of the United States is doing poorly and much worse compared to the time of Spanish Flu even with better technology and resources and this is due to their ignorance and failure of acknowledgement from their ruling government.

6.0 Conclusions and Discussions

Communication comparisons towards public pertaining to Spanish Flu (H1N1) and Covid-19 Pandemic through media especially found to be significant for both pandemic. Studies conducted through extensive literature review illustrated that both pandemics are devastating attack to humanity. However, with experience and ability in managing the effects has made human continue to survive. This was possible due to the use of the media in providing information to other. Well preparation and experience in handling matters makes one country, matured in facing the pandemic. Spanish Flu took a bit of time for the awareness of the pandemic to be widespread due to the ongoing World War while in the case of Covid-19, the awareness was earlier due to media technology being more advanced. The similarities between the two pandemics was using the technique of news release contains of emotional appeals led to reassurance among the audience. The elements of emotional appeals assist in persuading people to follow guidelines as well as the feeling of reassurance [21]. Meanwhile, researchers found that fear elements in messages also will assist in terms of controlling the public to stay put with the instructions given by the government [22]. This proven by researchers when study found that highlighting the seriousness of the pandemic followed by advice and reassurance from government has led to reassurance on effective management in one country [14]. These two elements of emotional appeal and fear can be used in both pandemic situations to control and persuade people to follow to contain the pandemic.

However, reviews also demonstrated that many of misinformation occurs during covid-19 appearance compared to Spanish Flu (H1N1). This is due to the advancement of technology. Misinformation was widely circulated at faster phase. The failure in controlling the fast phase information distribution has led to panic among the communities that caused them to be reluctant in following government instruction that can worsen the scenario [16]; [17]. In contradict, the spread of Spanish Flu (H1N1) failure happened to be due the lacking in providing information at faster phase to alert communities at many of the countries. Yet, finding shows and verified by Dr. Bennett that, the awareness of the virus towards Spain communities and from there other nations were able to become aware of the dangers of the flu. The country of Spain also printed guidelines and important information to avoid the spreading of the virus in their daily newspapers. Due to this, Spain however became as the origin of the virus even though the actual origin and cause was unknown at that time. The name Spanish flu also originated from this fact [23].

In addition, Spanish flu awareness was provided by the country of Spain which was a non-combatant country in the war and was not required to partake in the Wartime News Blackouts which most countries participating in the World War was subjected to. This allows the country of Spain to be heavily affected by the virus as well as allows them to report and spread the news of the virus effectively to other countries, but this was not until later through the lifespan of the Spanish Flu and that the Spanish was able to infect a huge number of communities. Meanwhile, Covid-19 pandemic in comparison was able to be reported early to the World Health Organization (WHO) and thus precautions and research regarding the virus was able to be conducted early. Certain countries such as Greenland and Australia were able to prepare their country early for the pandemic by already instructing their citizens through the media about the pandemic while some country still repeats the same mistakes of the Spanish flu in that they downplay the pandemic as well as taking the pandemic lightly which caught them off guard and is now currently affecting them drastically.

Therefore, from reviews made, there are significance of communication during the outbreak of pandemic towards communities. However, the technologies, has change 360-degree of how communication been delivered towards the communities. The main differences show how communication travels fast with the existence of social media has cause different issues and challenges arise. Hence, each pandemic has its own ways and reason in controlling the virus as well as public reactions to ensure confirmed safety and peace in a country.

7.0 References

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