



## More Panic than Awareness: Mapping Social Media at the Peak of the Pandemic

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**Abstract:** Media is considered to be the fourth pillar of democracy (Aarjav Jain, 2019). Presently, social media is also a part of it. It includes websites or applications which facilitate communication in all forms. In India, the content consumption through social media platforms has significantly increased in last few years especially during the lockdown phase. This phase also witnessed the spread of disinformation. The research would draw attention towards factors that raise questions on social media's reliability. The case study of social media platforms and the spread of fake news through the qualitative and quantitative research methodology bring forward a better vision towards this topic.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Hot Bed of Fake News, Pandemic, Misinformation, Credible Source, Demographic Factors.

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### Introduction:

New Age Media is one of the essential platforms of mass communication. Mass communication means connecting with a large number of audience at a particular time. In the past, print media was the only mode of mass media. After print media, the broadcast media spread among the masses but with the advent of social media, all became traditional and social media became the most modern and latest source of dissemination of information. In the last few years, it has been used as an effective weapon to polarize communities and upset democratic processes. Undoubtedly, it has made things convenient like it is inexpensive and portable, instant and interactive but simultaneously it was found responsible for the spread of fake news and information that is unauthentic and biased. This has damaged the true essence of journalism.

However, during the Covid-19 Pandemic and the lockdown phase, the printing presses were forced to shut down and the readers were completely dependent on broadcast media and new age media. This phase witnessed more panic than awareness amongst the people of India especially Patna, Bihar. The ordinary news was presented in such a manner, so as to catch the attention of the viewer and frighten them. The people became so engrossed in the virtual news that they lost touch with reality. There was no rigour of fact checking and sanitization. Therefore, it became necessary to be critical towards the messages and posts. Thus, the

attention needs to be drawn towards factors, which needs to be removed to keep the fourth pillar of democracy alive. The efforts should be taken to educate people to cross check the authenticity of any news before forwarding it.

### Hypothesis:

Since new age media is an open platform for everyone to generate and disseminate any piece of authentic or unauthentic information, it served as a hotbed of fake news. The havoc created during the pandemic further verified this. This proved that we cannot completely rely on information we get through the social media platforms.

- Majority people used social media as a source of information.
- Social media had a negative impact on people during pandemic and made them restless.
- Not everyone trusted news on social media.
- Social media was not the most reliable source of information during pandemic.

### Methodology:

Our entire research was based upon a two-tier methodology involving primary data analysis and secondary data analysis.

- **Primary Data :** Primary data were collected from 100 respondents belonging urban and semi urban area consisting of a variety of questions through offline mode.

Data was also collected from 126 people through online mode with the help of Google Forms.

These have been supplemented by interviews of some people closely attached to the field.

- **Secondary Data:** Secondary data related to the research were gathered from the data available online in the form articles and surveys conducted by various pages.

### Data Analysis:

The questionnaire comprised of 6 questions. The respondents just had to respond accordingly as this survey was done offline and keeping all the covid-19

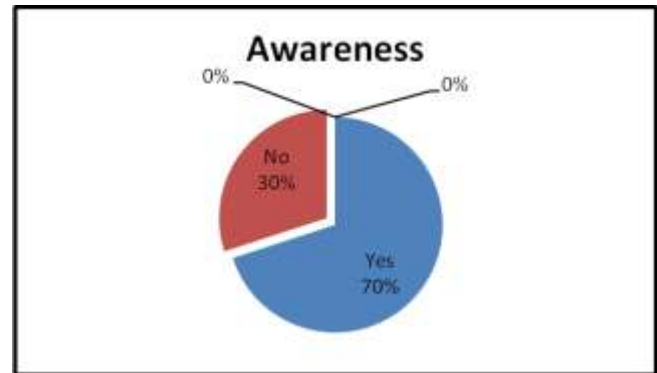
guidelines in mind. The data analysis was done on the basis of the responses provided by the respondents.

Total number of respondents: 100

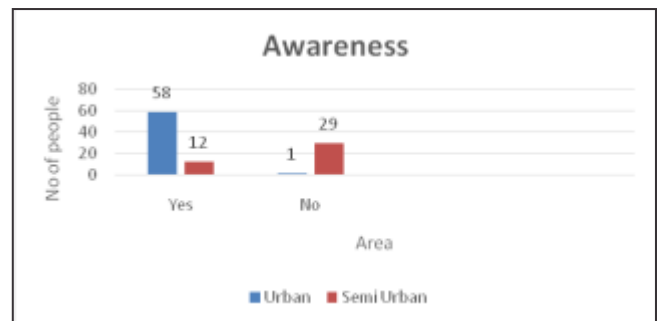
People who belonged to Urban Area: 59

People who belonged to Semi Urban Area: 41

### 1. Do you know what is Social Media?



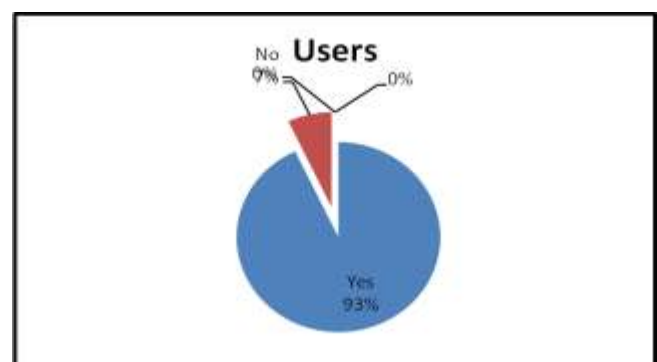
70% of the people were aware about Social Media



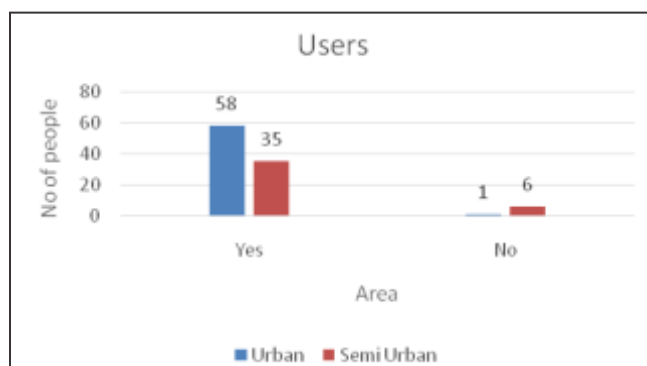
Area	Yes	No
Urban	58	1
Semi Urban	12	29

If we look at the area ratio, Out of 59 urban people, 1 was not aware of social media whereas in semi urban area, 29 out of 41 were unaware.

### 2. Are you a social media user?



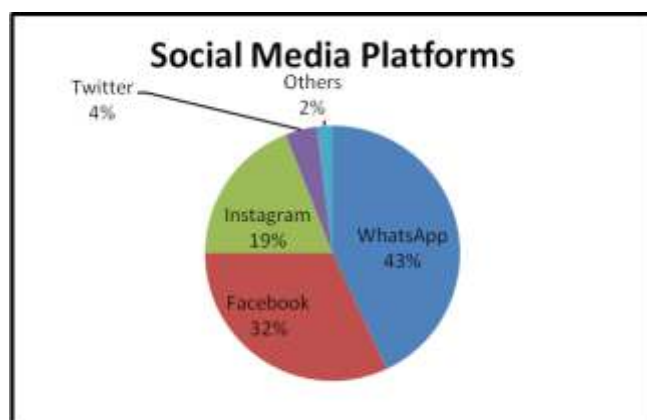
93% of the people are social media users



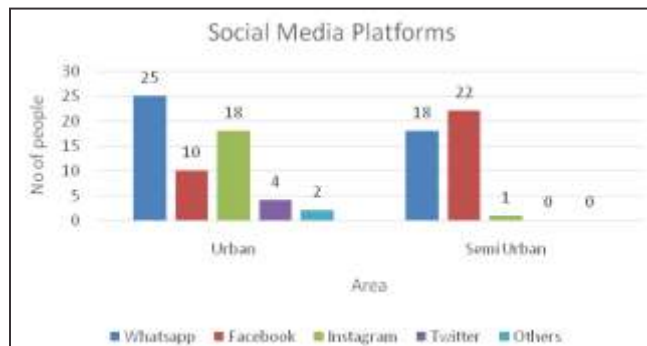
Area	Yes	No
Urban	58	1
Semi Urban	35	6

As per area ratio, 58 out of 59 people in urban area used social media whereas in semi urban 35 out of 41 people used social media.

### 3. Which social media do you use the most?



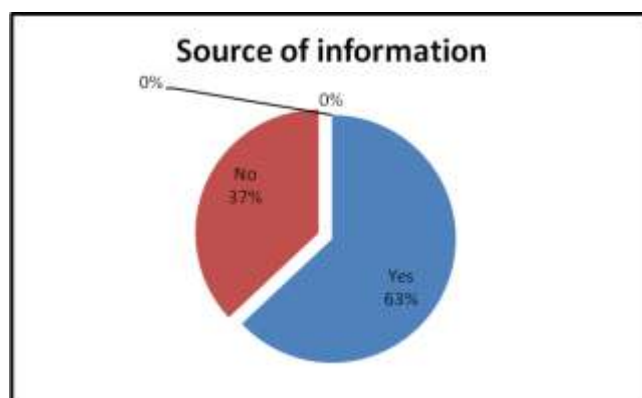
WhatsApp is the most used social media platform, followed by Facebook being the second most used platform.



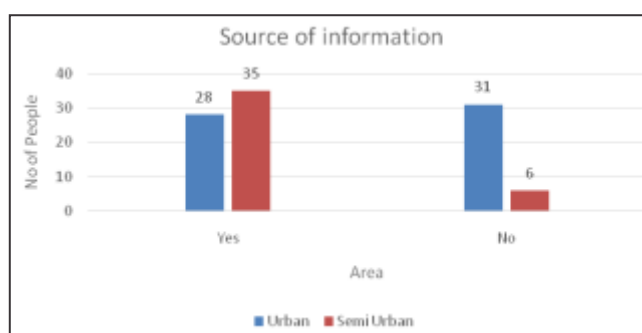
Area	WhatsApp	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	Others
Urban	25	10	18	4	2
Semi Urban	18	22	1	0	0

As per the data, WhatsApp is the most consumed platform by urban people whereas, semi urban people are more inclined towards Facebook.

### 4. Did you use social media as a source of information during Covid-19 Pandemic?



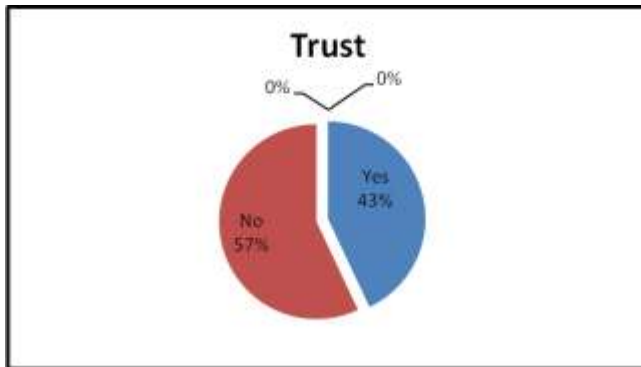
63% of the people used social media as a source of information during pandemic.



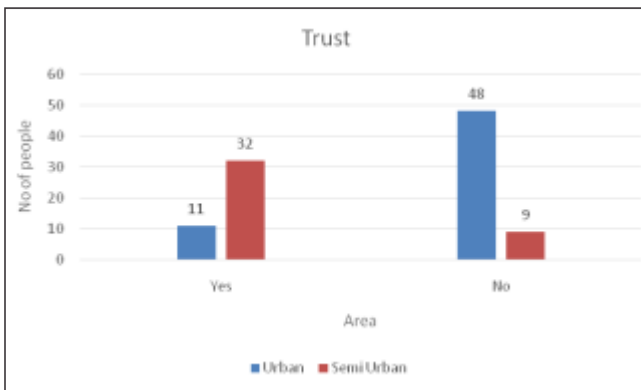
Area	Yes	No
Urban	28	31
Semi Urban	35	6

As per the data, 28 out of 59 urban people used social media as a source of information during pandemic whereas, there are 35 out of 41 people in semi urban area.

## 5. Did you trust the news you saw on social media during pandemic?



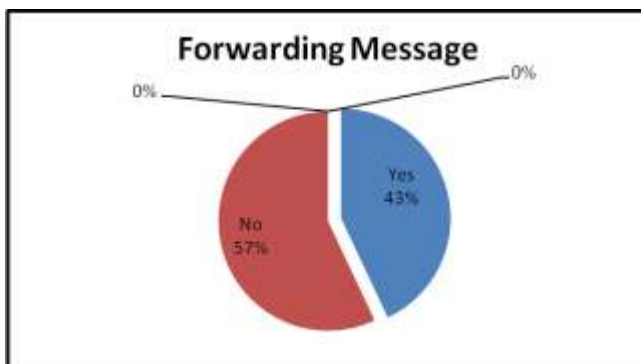
57% of the people did not trust the news on social media



Area	Yes	No
Urban	11	48
Semi Urban	32	9

As per the analysis, semi urban people believed news on social media more than urban people.

## 6. Did you forward every message you received on social media during pandemic?



57% of the people didn't forward every message they came across.



Area	Yes	No
Urban	8	51
Semi Urban	35	6

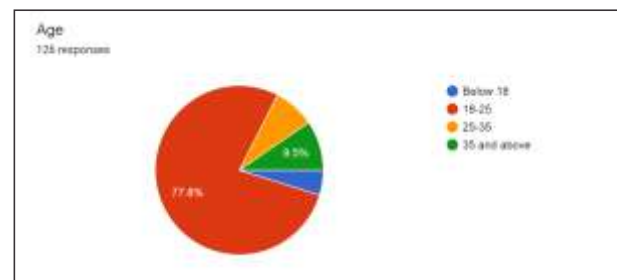
If we look at the area ratio, 35 out of 41 people in semi urban area forwarded every messages, whereas only 8 out of 59 from urban area forwarded messages.

## Data Analysis (Online Mode):

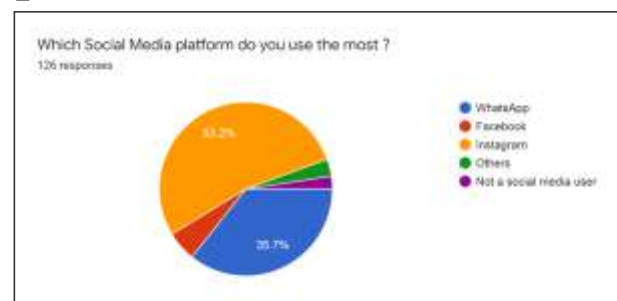
The questionnaire comprised of 10 questions. The survey was done through online mode due to pandemic, with the help of Google Forms. The data analysis was done on the basis of the responses provided by the respondents.

Total number of respondents: 126

### 1.



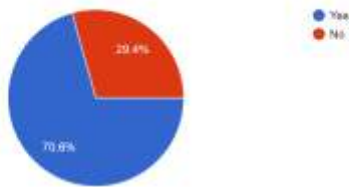
### 2



Instagram (53.2%) is the most used social media platform

3

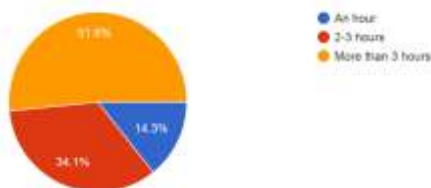
Are you socially active on various platforms?  
126 responses



**70.6% of the people are socially active**

4

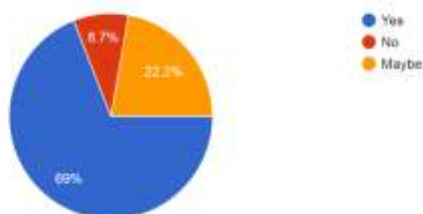
How much time did you spend on social media during the Covid-19 Pandemic ?  
126 responses



More than 50% people used social media for more than 3 hours during Covid-19 pandemic.

5

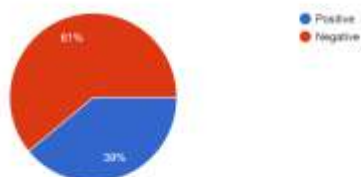
Did you use social media as a source of information during pandemic ?  
126 responses



Almost 69% of the people used social media to gain information during pandemic.

6

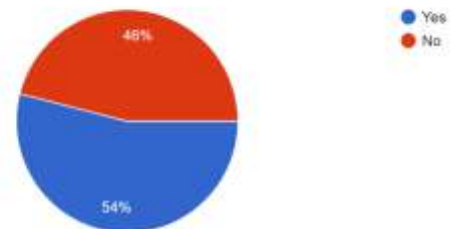
Do you think social media during the pandemic had a negative influence or positive influence?  
123 responses



61% of the people think that social media had a negative influence during pandemic.

7

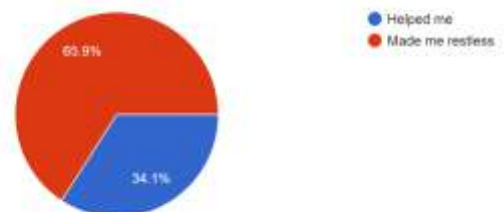
Did you believe the news you saw on social media during pandemic ?  
126 responses



Around 54% of the people trusted the news they saw on social media.

8

Did news on social media helped you or rather made you restless ?  
126 responses



65.9% of the people felt restless because of social media during pandemic

9

Did people around you share messages or information on social media irrespective of its authenticity ?  
126 responses



54% of the people shared messages or information on social media irrespective of its authenticity.

10

Did you witness any situation where there was a havoc due to spread of wrong information about Covid-19 or its variants ?  
126 responses

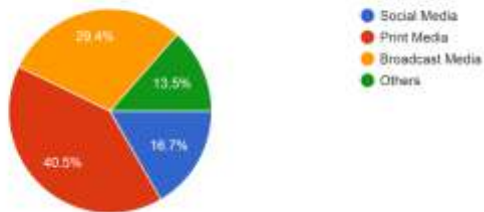


69% of the people were in a situation where there was havoc due to the spread of wrong information about Covid-19 or its variants.



11

Which source of information do you find most reliable ?  
126 responses



Almost 40.5% of the people find print media as the most reliable source of information

## 12.. Did you personally come across any fake news that had a major impact on the people during pandemic? If yes, please share your experience

- No i don't came across any fake news but I heard from others
- I m sorry, don't remember right now .
- Yes...many things were coming on social network media...most of them were not true and it was making people scared and emotionally weak.
- There were fake news about availability of medicines oxygen cylinders, wrong numbers were getting spread
- Yeah, during the first lockdown , scenes coming from china about the severity of covid-19 that people are falling on roads like a broken leaf made it horrible and created total chaos among people which was later recognised was fake.
- Yes, A lot of people with no clinical knowledge whatsoever spread made-u remedies for the prevention and cure of the disease which rather made people delusional that the remedies work better than medicines, making the situation of the patient even worse.
- There were so many messages circulated on WhatsApp and Instagram that we girls should not take vaccine if we are on our periods which is completely rubbish and has no logical point of view.
- That drinking sanitizer will clean germs of stomach.
- Yes the ridiculous havoc by the rumours that if you can hold your breath for 10 seconds, without

coughing or difficulty in breathing it indicates the absence of COVID-19 infection.

- Duplicate Covid vaccine news, Mostly in Uttar Pradesh.
- Yes, the nonsense rumours about vaccine inserting chips in people.

## Analysis:

It should come as no surprise that using social media platforms to check the latest news, watch and interact with friends' stories, create or share content, or just passively browse through the newsfeed, is universal among youth everywhere today (The UNESCO Courier, 2020). In this age of social media, we are also bombarded with misinformation and disinformation. The reason being that anyone can become a reporter as it is quite simple for people to share news, reports and messages they receive on social media without the rigor of fact checking. As Nobel Prize-winning economist and psychologist Herbert A. Simon noted, "What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients." One of the outcomes of the so-called attention economy is the loss of high-quality information. This is exactly what we witnessed during the pandemic. As the survey suggests, social media had a negative influence on a lot of people (61%). The news made 65.9% of people restless.

Based on the survey, we found out that 70.6% people are active users of social media and more than half the population were sharing information about Covid-19 and its variants irrespective of its authenticity. Semi-urban people could be held more responsible for it due to lack of rational thinking. On the other hand, the majority of urban people shared posts from trustworthy sources.

We also discovered that 52% of the population spent more than 3 hours on social media during the pandemic. WhatsApp and Instagram were the most common platforms to be used followed by Facebook. Among all of these, WhatsApp proved to be the hotbed of fake news where most of the unauthentic information being forwarded many times resulted in disturbance of the psychological state of the unaware civilians.

If we question "How does social media act as an accelerator for fake news?" To which one of our

respondents answered, "The rigor of editing, also called gatekeeping where somebody is there to check and verify what the reporter has filed, is missing in social media. That's why social media has an inbuilt lacuna in terms of fake news." This also accounts to the reason why most (40.5%) of the people find Print Media to be the most reliable for news consumption.

### **Limitations and Suggestions:**

Gathering survey samples amidst the pandemic adversities caused them to be smaller in size and might have caused a little degradation in its gravity or the presentation of substantial data or figures concerned with the research. Moreover, since the survey was conducted online, it lacks a comparative study of specific semi-urban areas which might or might not have experienced the same consequences of the overpowering social media theories about the pandemic. Each of these aspects ideally should be expanded for any analytical study on this topic. Such a study would have given a comprehensive perspective of social media taking over other forms of media providing information about the curse of Covid-19.

In addition to the other factors, the desire to interact with the civil society initiatives in terms of opinion and action about the subject remained unfulfilled. This research restricted the exploration of the area of interventions and the joy of engaging with the agencies for their diverging opinions. The survey was done in the urban and semi urban parts of Patna, where the demographic status of the respondents might have not been as diverse as intended due to the restrictions imposed, hence barring us from providing equality in the contributing beliefs.

### **Conclusion:**

The interviews of experts and locals and the online and offline surveys and evidences favours to a great extent the idea of social media driving people to a state of anxiety and mental slowdown during the pandemic by giving misinformation among all age groups and area, be it urban or semi urban. The US Census Bureau surveyed more than 42% of people and identified symptoms of depression and higher anxiety levels in December 2020, which was 11% higher than the previous year (Abbas Jaffar, 2020).

We totally cannot deny the fact that social media platforms cannot be ignored although being a hotbed of many false information and news.

People use it for multitasking like communication and entertainment purposes. It has also become a major source of income for many. Social media is a spontaneous platform where anything and everything can be forwarded and shared then and there. It totally depends on how the users consume the information and what they want to take out of it. But also now, most of them believe that the best mode for news consumption are the news portals themselves, or print media like newspapers and broadcast media like radio and television.

News is credible only when it has facts, authentic sources and which involves professionalism. So, being dependent on social media for news consumption should be taken as a pinch of salt.

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