

# The Role of Digital Media in Public Awareness During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to monitor the role of digital media in facing the COVID-19 pandemic, as the media play a prominent and essential role in building images of reality among the public through the information they provide, and from here comes the role of the media in general and digital media in particular in contributing. In creating awareness among the masses of how to deal with this crisis, the media play a fundamental role during disasters and crises, as they work to deliver the necessary information to the public and the general public, as well as interpret events, provide moral support to affected communities, and contribute to digital coverage that is characterized by speed and keeping pace with events. Disasters and crises play a very important role in determining and shaping trends towards what is happening. The results indicate that some Arab countries have taken advantage of the effective role of digital media in facing the crisis and raising awareness about it, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia scored first in facing this crisis by launching many applications that served citizens very much during the crisis and by launching many digital means on websites and their issuance through mobile applications, which facilitates the process of communicating with citizens, educating them and protecting their health, which had a great impact on controlling the crisis.

**KEYWORDS:** Digital Media, Awareness, Coronavirus

## Introduction

With the beginning of this year 2020 AD, the whole world witnessed a dangerous crisis. And the COVID-19 pandemic. Authority, as this pandemic has caused more than thirteen million people around the world, and nearly a million people died within a first period (WHO 2020), as this period began the emergence of a new type of virus in the city of "Wuhan" of the strain coronaviruses, or what is known as the Middle East respiratory intake, and it was called COVID-19, and the virus quickly spread throughout China in a state of emergency in the country, and the city of Wuhan—the epicenter of the emergence of the virus—was isolated from the rest of Chinese cities.

Here comes the role of the media in contributing to the formation of awareness among the masses to deal with and deal with these decisions, as the media play a fundamental role during disasters and crises as they work to deliver the necessary information to the public and the general public, as well as interpret events, and provide moral support to the afflicted communities. It also contributes to the press, radio and television coverage of disasters and crises, with a very important role in determining and shaping trends towards what is happening.

## Media and Crisis Management

The media has become an increasing role and a serious importance as one of the weapons of the present age in its coverage of crisis management, due to the enormous capabilities it has, represented in its rapid transmission, crossing borders, and overcoming obstacles with its readable, audiovisual means, and because of its tremendous capabilities on psychological impact on Individuals and intellectual control and persuasion of the public in different societies, and then the ability to control and direct their behaviors (Salam & Fayed 2019, 252).

And when the expected crisis is general and global, the role of the media in carrying out its informational, educational and persuasive tasks increases. Through awareness, guidance and direction through direct communication between the operations rooms for facing crises and the audience of viewers, listeners and readers to warn them of the imminent dangers that have been foreseen, and when, where, and where they will occur and their paths (Nimmo & Combs 1985, 12).

The importance of new media is to alleviate crises by providing the public with facts to limit the spread of rumors and enlighten individuals to help them form a correct public opinion. And a source of fallacies, especially at the present time when the new media in various forms and social networks have topped the media scene and have become the means closest to the public, and what is acceptable in social networks has become acceptable in real society.

Just as the media can spread reassurance among people during crises by spreading facts and providing balanced treatments, it can also contribute to increasing the levels of anxiety, tension and blurring of vision among the public, which is reflected negatively on various sectors, and perhaps what helps in this is the nature of the media. The new itself in terms of being open means difficult to control, and spread rumors and information alike in a large and rapid manner, with which it is difficult to monitor and track everything that is circulating among people. Therefore, addressing the crisis in the media requires the integration of private and governmental media efforts. Institutions and individuals within a general vision to protect the country and immunize it from the resulting influences (Al-Buhairi 2008, 25).

#### *Identifying aspects and deficiencies in media handling of crises and disasters*

If the science of crisis and disaster management emphasizes the necessity of achieving an integrative approach and a comprehensive vision in dealing with crises and disasters, which is based on full cooperation and interaction of all sciences related to the crisis and the social, political, economic, psychological, moral, symbolic, media and cultural challenges it poses. Media has become one of the sciences of critical importance in crisis and disaster management. This science shows that disaster management includes setting the goals of prior plans, which include several steps: First: the preparation plan (pre-crisis), second: the operations plan (during the crisis), third: the plan to remove the effects (after the crisis) and finally the alternative plans (regionally and nationally).

#### **Features and characteristics required in crisis and disaster notification**

If scholars and those interested in the science of crisis management have emphasized that any disaster or crisis consists of three main elements: threat - lack of time and its limitations - surprise, then they also confirmed that these three elements impose on the media a special, different and distinct performance that is characterized by responsibility and good Dealing with this disaster and crisis in a way that helps raise the level of public awareness of it, and managing it in a way that reduces its losses to the lowest extent possible ... Hence the literature in the field of crisis management has concluded a number of important features and characteristics that must be met in the media treatment and media discourse During a crisis or disaster, it can be summarized as follows: Keeping up with media coverage of the stages of the development of the crisis or disaster ... as previous studies indicate that media coverage of crises and disasters is supposed to pass through three main stages that keep pace with the development of the disaster crisis, namely (Graber 1980, 363):

A) The stage of information dissemination at the beginning of the crisis or disaster. Here, the media must keep pace with the public's desire to obtain all possible information about the crisis or disaster and to clarify the situation, its dimensions and effects.

B) The stage of interpreting the information: In this stage, the media must analyze the elements of the crisis, research its roots and causes, and compare them with other similar crises or disasters. And methods of containment and rescue efforts

C) The preventive phase: where the role of the media does not depend on merely explaining the problem and dealing with its elements, but rather this dimension must go beyond the media's progress in dealing with crises and similar disasters, and it focuses on the positive mechanisms that can be exploited and developed in the future in dealing with these crises and disasters.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not safe from this risk of infection with this virus, as cases of infection spread in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Kingdom took measures to provide protection for the safety of citizens and residents and all those who intend to come to the lands of the Kingdom, to perform Umrah, visit the Prophet's Mosque, or for the purpose of tourism. On the recommendations of the competent health authorities, to take proactive preventive measures to prevent the arrival of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19) to the Kingdom and its spread, and for this reason the Kingdom's government represented by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah decided to temporarily suspend entry to the Kingdom for the purposes of Umrah and to visit the Prophet's Mosque temporarily. The Kingdom offers tourist visas for those coming from countries where the spread of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19) poses a risk (Ali Qadri 2002).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the first countries that sensed the danger of the Coronavirus, and one of the first countries that made proactive and precautionary efforts to prevent the virus and limit its spread at an early stage, as it dealt with the disease seriously, as it began to prevent gatherings in public and private places, through the closure of restaurants, Then the suspension of studies and work, the closure of markets and commercial complexes, the closure of airports, the suspension of internal and external flights, the closure of mosques, the suspension of Friday prayers and the suspension of Umra

The Kingdom faced the Corona epidemic, with high professionalism, and dealt with the crisis that is roaming the world realistically, according to precautionary and proactive measures, and a daily announcement with full transparency and clarity, and that dealt with international praises, while the concern of the government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques was to preserve the health of citizens and residents alike As well as preserving the safety of the pilgrims of the Two Holy Mosques from this epidemic

From the first hours and days before the announcement of the existence of any case infected with the Coronavirus in the Kingdom, a committee was formed of 13 ministries headed by the Minister of Health, concerned with following up the health status of the Coronavirus, and its membership includes representatives from the ministries: «Defense, Energy, Interior, National Guard, Foreign Affairs, Health, Finance, Media, Trade and Investment, Hajj and Umrah, and Education », the Civil Aviation Authority, the Saudi Red Crescent Authority, the Food and Drug General Authority, the General Customs Authority, the Ministry of Tourism, and the National Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

The World Health Organization praised the Kingdom's efforts to combat the coronavirus, and most of the ambassadors residing in the Kingdom praised the serious steps taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to protect its people. And those residing in it advised their citizens to stay in the Kingdom, where security, safety and comfort to live, until the sorrow was revealed.

As for the unprecedented air evacuation plan for students, their families, and everyone who wished to return under high security and health measures, from all over the world. We can only pray for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques ... and the officials responsible for this. This was also done for residents inside the Kingdom.

As for digital media, the Kingdom has launched many applications that have served citizens very greatly during the crisis by launching many digital means on websites and making them through mobile applications, which facilitates communication with citizens, educating them and protecting their health.

### **Tatman application**

On April 11th, the Saudi Ministry of Health launched the "Tatman" application, with the aim of providing protection and health care to citizens and residents referred to home isolation, in order to ensure their safety and enhance their recovery procedures.

The application contains an icon for services that includes a library of educational content, test results, contact information updates, daily follow-up of health status, links to support epidemiological investigation, as well as an indicator of the number of decreasing health isolation, as well as alert notifications and automatic calls, and the application also includes an icon of beneficiaries who are «coming from travel And those in contact with infected cases», according to the official website of the Ministry of Health (<https://ta.sdaia.gov.sa/>).

The isolated people are able to communicate directly with doctors at the Ministry of Health, and they can request help through an icon in the application for continuous inquiries about their status, as well as monitoring the development of their condition. A person suspected of being infected with the virus will have transparent access to the results of the tests conducted for him by the health authorities.

### **Tawakalna application**

Based on the keenness of the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - may God support it - to preserve the health and safety of citizens and residents on its territory from the danger of the spread of the new coronavirus; The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority "SADAYA" launched the "Tawakalna" application, to support government efforts to confront the coronavirus.

The aim of "Tawakalna" application at its inception is to contribute to managing the process of granting permits electronically during the curfew period, for employees of government sectors, employees of the private sector, in addition to individuals, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and a number of government agencies during the imposed period of prevention, which helped reduce From the spread of the coronavirus in the Kingdom.

During the cautious return phase, and lifting the prevention measures, the application launched several important new services that contribute to achieving a safe return, most notably clarifying the health status of the application user through colored codes with the highest levels of safety and privacy.

Because facing the corona pandemic requires the concerted efforts of the state and society, the "Tawakkilna" application has allowed individuals to contribute to this by reporting individuals and gatherings that violate the precautionary measures in place, in addition to reporting entry to the prohibited neighborhoods, which were isolated based on the discretion of the concerned authorities.

### **Tabaud app - we are all responsible**

On the health and safety of citizens and residents on its territory from the risk of the spread of the new coronavirus; The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority "SADAYA" has launched a "spacing" application, to support government efforts to confront coronavirus.

Pursuant to the health system and its implementing regulations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Health has adopted the health standards according to which the application of (spacing) has been developed, and the characteristics and functions of this application will be subject to any additional instructions issued in implementation of the regulations and provisions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in order to achieve the health and safety goal envisaged by Developing the application by involving individuals in controlling the outbreak of the emerging coronavirus pandemic, limiting its expansion in its spread, and seeking to gradually reduce restrictions imposed on social life and other activities

The application (spacing) is a means of notifying contacts of people infected with the emerging coronavirus, as individuals can download the application and use it to achieve the health goal for which it was developed.

The application sends disguised identifiers data to the smart phones used for the application, which were recorded during the period of contact with a person infected with the emerging coronavirus, accompanied by data of the devices of infected people, according to the global policies of (Google and Apple) companies, while preserving the privacy of users.

The application enables the user to obtain direct and proactive notifications in the event of discovering any recorded infection, for the purpose of requesting direct health support from the Ministry of Health in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## Conclusion

Overall, countries have strived to address the corona pandemic by activating digital media mechanisms and artificial intelligence techniques and employing them in the face of this crisis. From the model of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we find a successful model on the international level to address the corona pandemic.

Importantly, media platforms and applications had an important role, starting with providing services to citizens and helping them through patients, providing them with treatment and following them up periodically, which alleviated much of the crisis.

The media remains the mirror of society and guides public opinion for everything that is in the public interest, as these applications represented a watershed point in peoples' lives because they provided a large number of services through which digital media techniques were employed in health awareness during the corona pandemic and to reach the best desired results.

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