Traditional Media at the Beginning of the Unknown: Managing Health Uncertainty through TV News Programs in Turkey

Ayşe Narin (a), Ayşen Temel Eğinli (b) & Cemile Kübra Deviren (c)

(a) Independent Researcher. Izmir, Turkey. Email: ayse.narin[at]gmail.com

(b) Ege University. Izmir, Turkey. Email: aysen.temel.eginli[at]ege.edu.tr

(c) Ministry of Education. Sanliurfa, Turkey. Email: c.kubradeviren[at]gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find how TV news programs, as part of traditional media source, supply the needs of public within the uncertainty management theory and information-seeking scope during the initial phase of COVID-19 pandemic. A thematic analysis of first four streaming of each TV news programs with the first four highest ratings between March 18th and May 1th 2020 in Turkey was chosen for this study. This period was chosen because it was the first peak of the pandemic in Turkey when people felt uncertain and needed more information about their health. The results have shown that the uncertainty and information gaps have also been reflected in TV programs including the information provided by the experts. This study also reveals that in cases which concern public health, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional media continues to play a significant role in meeting the information needs of the society, and that the traditional media also uses social media's speed in conveying information. We suggest that future studies may focus on the interaction of traditional media and social media in meeting information-seeking behaviours and managing uncertainty to acquire more data.

Keywords

Traditional Media; Information Seeking Behaviour; Uncertainty; Health Uncertainty; Uncertainty Management; COVID-19 Pandemic

Традиционные СМИ перед лицом неизвестного: управление неопределенностью в отношении здоровья с помощью новостных телепрограмм в Турции

Нарин Айше (a), Эгинли Айшен Темел (b), Девирен Джемиле Кюбра (c)

(a) Независимый исследователь. Измир, Турция. Email: ayse.narin[at]gmail.com

(b) Эгейский университет. Измир, Турция. Email: aysen.temel.eginli[at]ege.edu.tr

(c) Министерство образования. Шанлыурфа, Турция. Email: c.kubradeviren[at]gmail.com

Аннотация

Цель данного исследования - выяснить, как новостные телепрограммы, являющиеся частью традиционных СМИ, удовлетворяют потребности общества в рамках теории управления неопределенностью и поиска информации на начальном этапе пандемии COVID-19. Для данного исследования был выбран тематический анализ первых четырех потоков каждой новостной телепрограммы с первыми четырьмя самыми высокими рейтингами в период с 18 марта по 1 мая 2020 года в Турции. Данный период был выбран потому, что это был первый пик пандемии в Турции, когда люди чувствовали себя неуверенно и нуждались в дополнительной информации о своем здоровье. Результаты показали, что неопределенность и информационные пробелы также нашли отражение в телевизионных программах, включая информацию, предоставленную экспертами. Данное исследование также показывает, что в случаях, касающихся общественного здравоохранения, таких как пандемия COVID-19, традиционные СМИ продолжают играть важную роль в удовлетворении информационных потребностей общества, и что традиционные СМИ также используют скорость социальных медиа в передаче информации. Мы предполагаем, что будущие исследования могут сосредоточиться на взаимодействии традиционных и социальных СМИ в удовлетворении поведения, связанного с поиском информации и управлением неопределенностью, чтобы получить больше данных.

Ключевые слова

Introduction

The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has made people more curious about a wide range of information concerning the virus. The existence of an infection caused by a novel Coronavirus, SARS-CoV2 in Wuhan City in the Hubei State of China causing pneumonia was unexpected from the rapid worldwide spread (WHO, 2020). As Baeva (2021) underlined, the pandemic was "unpredictable, uncontrollable, covering almost all of humanity, changing the lives of everyone". Given the enormous uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic in its initial phase, the negative behavioural response such as information overload and misinformation was significantly heightened globally due to information gaps that emerged between scientists, medicine, and public health. Due to the severity of this health crisis, the rapid spreading of information on social media platforms, and the spreading of excessive and groundless information and news has generated an "infodemic" which is defined as the hazards of misinformation during the outbreaks (Tentolouris et al., 2021). Besides the physical impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the level of fear and panic in society and created significant psychological impacts varying from depression, anxiety, to panic attacks (First et al., 2021; Vaezi & Javanmard, 2020). This kind of fear and panic has led to the spreading of unevidenced information. While the virus is rapidly spreading around the globe, the need for information drives traditional media and social media channels to pursue urgency. Despite the capabilities and accessibility of new media sources, traditional media including the radio, TV, and newspaper still plays a crucial role in informing people in everyday life (Baraybar-Fernández et al., 2021; Casero-Ripollés, 2020). According to data revealed by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU, 2020) and Comscore (2020), daily viewing of TV news increased by 20% in Europe in March 2020 versus 2019, and viewing of the big four broadcast networks (ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox) has increased by 19% versus the same week in 2019 in the United States. While social media is emerging primarily in daily life situations with its influential and interactive position, traditional media still plays a significant role, particularly in healthcare crises in terms of information credibility in bringing scientific information regarding health and medicine to the public (Austin et al., 2012; Gunther, 1998; Jo, 2005; Snow, 2008). Casero-Ripollés (2020) stated that traditional media, particularly television situated a central role with the highest levels of consumption and credibility and has a predominance during a crises such as COVID-19.

Even though the literature focuses on how mass media served health information during the early stages of the pandemic, the limited study examined how TV channels serve health information to reduce public health uncertainty in detail. The purpose of this study is to explore how TV news programs provide health information demands in Turkey at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic within the framework of the uncertainty management approach. Understanding the role of TV news programs as traditional media sources in the COVID-19 pandemic might be

a resource for future global healthcare crises. The trustworthiness in serving information during crises times is important as in providing information. This kind of double-sided credibility – in serving and consuming information – might be vital during crises times for public health. Therefore we also aim to reveal what kind of information is primarily crucial provided by television during the public health crises.

Information seeking behaviour and COVID-19 pandemic

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on March 11, 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. After the declaration, the pandemic has turned into a global health crisis that is required to be tackled. The authorities have faced extreme challenges due to a lack of information over a wide range about this growing health issue. Chunara et.al. (2012) stated that all health authorities including doctors, politicians, and other public health authorities needed proper data to manage the pandemic within the first days of the outbreak; however, the early assessment of the pandemic could not be provided adequately due to the lack of information. The lack of information, the quick spread of the virus and the uncertainties regarding potential risks because of this unknown virus have caused panic in the public, and the mass media has become the most significant source of information (Anwar et al., 2020; Parvin et al., 2020). Lee and Basnyat (2013) argue that, in pandemics, experts focus on conveying information immediately through media for public health. From the public side, on the other hand, people focus on updates and preventive actions due to the nature of the situation.

Information-seeking is a construction process in which people are actively afforded to find and understand the meaning the information over a period of time (Kuhlthau, 1993). According to Wilson (1981, p. 5–6), information needs arise from social situations; not merely from cognitive situations, but also from physiological situations and security. Resolution of the situation which causes uncertainty depends on satisfying basic information needs adequately. Wilson (1981) suggested the following definition for this process: "information-seeking towards the satisfaction of needs". In Wilson's information-seeking behaviour model, perceived unmet information needs increase information-seeking behaviour. People try to satisfy their needs from official or unofficial sources. These efforts may result in success or failure in terms of the satisfaction of needs. These kinds of failures which mostly face unsuccessful and unsatisfactory results in searching for information, turn into a new search effort for different sources. Wilson (1981) also suggests that people exchange their information to find new information sources; when they find the information to be helpful and satisfying, they share this knowledge with other people. The information exchange process leads to interaction between people and then this interaction leads to communication. On the other hand, in Kathhlau's (1993) model, information-seeking is an initiated process when people feel uncertain and anxious about a topic or question. Uncertainty is closely associated with confu-

sion and frustration, and those affective symptoms are caused by vague, unclear thoughts due to an information gap. Skarpa and Garoufallou (2020) stated that information-seeking behaviour is triggered by the motivation to reduce uncertainty.

Information, in the age of technology, is the most significant source in creating a sense of security by explaining what to do and how to stay safe (Lazarus, 2006). Therefore, psychosocial support plays a significant role in human life and is the key element for mental health, particularly in crisis times and disasters which are the main sources of uncertainty and anxiety. Hobfoll et al. (2007) stated that psychosocial support provided through information ensures a sense of trust, staying calm, self-sufficiency, and social-sufficiency, staying in touch, and hope. In times of crisis, a large number of information that is being shared throughout the media channels leads to misunderstanding, and spreading fake news threatens the health and well-being of people (Apuke & Omar, 2021; First et al., 2021; Fishman & Casarett, 2006). The media itself both have negative and positive impacts on all age groups on all social subjects such as economy, education, health and working conditions (Alalawi & Al-Jenaibi, 2016; Sharma et al., 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic which is a health emergency, immediate response about the situation was expected from the media: to report valid information professionally and instantly regarding the growing health crisis. Contrary to expectation, in the initial phase of the pandemic, some media channels made biased announcements about China and Chinese people such titles as the "Chinese virus", "Chinese virus pandemonium", "China kids stay home" and "China is the real sick man of Asia." Besides discriminative media coverage, misleading news also caused worry among people (Wen et al., 2020, Yang et al., 2021). Besides, from the beginning of the declaration of the pandemic globally, public health experts have shared the information, precautions and government plans throughout the media (Garfin et al., 2020; Scopelliti et al., 2021; Tagliabue et al., 2020). However, recent research indicated that the high level of media exposure during the pandemic is associated with negative psychological outcomes and COVID-19-related anxiety (Chao et al., 2020; Liu & Liu, 2020; Scopelliti et al., 2021). Sharma et al. (2020) have found that, during the pandemic, the mass media affected the daily routines, work life, and quality of life, particularly the psychology of the people. In their study, a positive significant correlation was found between the time spent watching the news on COVID-19 and nervousness and anxiety levels. On the other hand, in terms of the credibility of mass media, Cain et al. (2020) found that credibility still plays a significant role in considering information sources. Likewise, Sakharova et al. (2020) stated that student groups, who regularly use digital media in their daily lives, also find the mass media trustworthy in order to obtain information. Moreover, several studies stated that traditional media channels are commonly seen as more credible sources of information (Eriksson, 2018; Ruiu, 2020; Schultz et al. 2011; Scopelliti et al., 2021; Van Aelst et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2020).
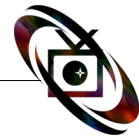
Theoretical framework: uncertainty management during COVID-19 pandemic

Uncertainty Management Theory has been broadly accepted in health and health communication (Rains & Tukachinsky, 2015; Brashers, 2001). It offers a framework to better understand how people manage their uncertainty in different ways. The theory also gives a variety of communication strategies for managing the uncertainty from several sources like health care providers, peers, friends, family, and media (Brashers et.al., 2017). Brashers (2001, p.478) state that uncertainty "exists when details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general". Furthermore, as Afifi and his colleagues (2012, 2013) refer to Parsons' (1980, p. 145) explanation of uncertainty stated that "exposure to uncertainty is perhaps the most important negative aspect of what many have considered to be the central feature of human life."

People may feel uncertain about their health statuses such as ambiguous symptoms, unclear diagnosis, or lack of information on their health situation (Brashers, 2001). Research suggests that information-seeking behavior is a common reaction to uncertain health situations (Mishel, 1988; Miller, 2014). Mishel (1988) noted that lack of consistent findings patterns are the most important indicator of uncertainty. The uncertainty literature also suggests that information-seeking behavior, avoidance, and reinterpretation of the situation are three main information management strategies to health status uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Kuang & Wilson, 2017). Although there is a variety of ways to manage uncertainty, our study focuses on information-seeking behavior questing how traditional media attempts to provide information to manage COVID-19 uncertainty. Therefore, we do not focus on avoidance behavior and reinterpretation in our study.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant uncertainty worldwide. Based on the uncertainty management approach, traditional media sources might be a response to COVID-19 information-seeking to reduce the uncertainty that has been evaluated as a danger or an opportunity (Rains, 2014). From the perspective of Uncertainty Management Theory, the COVID-19 outbreak experience is closely related to illness uncertainty. Therefore, COVID-19 uncertainty particularly characterizes as complexity and ambiguity (Tandoc & Lee, 2020) caused by a significant threat to individuals' health and those who have contact, also people who are vulnerable given their age and current health conditions (Crowley et. al,2020). As Brashers (2001) discusses, there are two primary assumptions is underlying the uncertainty management process. The first is that the individuals interpret uncertainty for its meaning. For example, uncertainty refers to danger in illness situations whereas it represents opportunity if certainty would be more disturbing than uncertainty (Brashers et. al, 2000; Mishel, 1988). Moreover, when uncertainty is appraised as danger, fear or anxiety are likely to be the potential outcomes (Rains &

Tucachinsky, 2015). Therefore, individuals will seek information to reduce their anxiety as a consequence of uncertainty. However, anxiety turns to fear if uncertainty is not resolved (Brashers, 2001; Mishel, 1988). As some scholars stated, uncertainty is also associated with depression (Mishel,1988), psychological distress (Afifi et al., 2012), and intrusive thoughts and avoidance behavior (Parker et al., 2013). The second assumption implies that the main tool for managing uncertainty is communication. Although given widespread use of the internet for health purposes, and a growing interest in seeking information online on health issues (Rains, 2014; Rains & Tucachinsky, 2015), traditional media including offline newspapers, TV, and radio have been seen as reliable and credible sources for health information (Cho et.al.,2015; Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Health care providers can be viewed as an informational channel that individuals use to find health information (Tian & Robinson, 2008). For this reason, health care professionals as formal sources are likely to contain primary COVID-19 information.

The presence of uncertainty is another term that needs to be discussed within the uncertainty management theory. Uncertainty may occur continually or in the short term based on the duration of the event that causes uncertainty. For instance, an event for a limited time may cause short-term uncertainty, or an ongoing situation such as chronic illness may cause long-term uncertainty (Brashers, 2001).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore how TV news programs as traditional media meet the public health information needs during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic within the framework of the uncertainty management approach.

The uncertainty management perspective outlines an understanding of what kind of information serves on TV news programs to reduce health-related uncertainty during COVID-19. Furthermore, some scholars (Scopelliti et.al., 2021; Van Aelst et al., 2021; Zhao et.al., 2020) have stated that mass media are seen as a credible source in particular in times of high uncertainty and social disturbance. In line with this statement, we additionally examine this argument, that is, wishing to understand in detail how traditional media still re-construct this reputation in a digital era as suggested by some researchers.

Therefore, we defined three research questions to be answered in line with our study purpose:

RQ 1: What kind of information was primarily shared in TV news programs which focused on the COVID-19 pandemic in order to serving vital health information within the information-seeking perspective?

RQ 2: What were the messages given through the information relayed at these discussion programs in terms of reducing public health uncertainty?

RQ 3: Which sources were used in these news programs to satisfy the public health information needs during the first peak of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Data Collection

Data was obtained from TV news programs chosen through TIAK (Television Audience Measurement Committee) by researchers among TV channels with the first four highest ratings. According to Villena-Alarcón and Caballero-Galeote (2021), daily news broadcasts are one of the highest-rated programs on television. Therefore, the source of data for this study was four TV news programs on COVID-19 broadcasted between March 12, 2020, and June 10, 2020, which was the first month of the declaration. The first four streams after declaration for each program and in total 16 programs were chosen for this study. The data was obtained from online open archives of these four channels (A Haber; CNN Türk; NTV; Haber Türk) for verbatim transcription.

News programme	Channel	Broadcasting Date	Duration (hrs)	Wordcount of transcript
Arka Plan	A Haber (A News)	18.03.2020	01.36.17	11.764
		01.04.2020	01.33.22	9.770
		07.04.2020	01.38.38	10.539
		15.04.2020	01.42.03	12.217
Tarafsız Bölge	CNN Türk	16.03.2020	03.14.43	18.641
		18.03.2020	03.37.41	28.737
		23.03.2020	03.16.05	24.020
		25.03.2020	03.24.28	24.958
Küresel Salgın	NTV	28.04.2020	01.37.06	11.448
		29.04.2020	01.33.31	11.123
		30.04.2020	01.12.32	7.690
		01.05.2020	01.38.59	12.145
Türkiye'nin Nabzı	Haber Türk	17.03.2020	01.59.52	13.029
		19.03.2020	01.59.51	14.824
		24.03.2020	02.22.43	18.258
		26.03.2020	02.13.55	16.290

Table 1. TV news programmes (n=16)

The total duration of programs was 40 hours and 29 seconds. Total ratings of March 2021 of TV channels (TIAK, 2020) are as follows: A Haber (0.54%), CNN Turk (0.44%), NTV (0.41%), and Haber Turk (0.39%). Accordingly, the Prime Time (20.00-23.00) discussion programs of these TV channels are A Haber (Arka Plan: Every Wednesday at 21.00), CNN Türk (Tarafsız Bölge: Every Monday and

Wednesday at 20.00), NTV (Küresel Salgın: Every Day at 21.00 throughout the pandemic) and Haber Türk (Türkiye'nin Nabzı: Every Monday and Wednesday at 21.00). TIAK is an independent institution that has been established to organize and audit television audience measurement. Rating data have been evaluated in terms of TV channels through TIAK, news programmes have not been included in the rating reports specifically. Thus, news programmes for data collection have been chosen by researchers among TV channels with the first four high ratings.

Analysis

The data were coded and analysed through Maxqda 2020 (Verbi Software, Berlin, Germany) program. The texts obtained from these TV channels' open archives in online websites were recorded and then transferred to Maxqda. All records were transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. In thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) principles of the thematic analysis process were adopted which comprises six phases.

Findings

In this study, with the goal of determining the ways in which media met the information-seeking needs of people at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, four TV news programs broadcast in the highest rating TV channels between March 16th and May first were decoded through the thematic analysis method. In the thematic analysis, we identified 5 main themes, and 29 subthemes within this research context, and we listed them in Table 2.

Main themes (n = 5)	Sub-themes (n = 29)
Information about COVID-19	Virus types, symptoms, transmission, complications, diagnostic tests, test protocols, filiation and isolation, diagnosis and treatment, drugs, vaccines, death, restrictions and new precautions, daily COVID-19 chart, healthcare workers and hospital capacities (n = 15)
Precautions	Psychological wellbeing, diet and nutrition, staying physically active, wearing facemask, social distance, social isolation, cleaning and hygiene (n = 7)
Psychological Effects	Psychological effects of quarantine and social isolation, social effects of anxiety, suspect of being infected (n = 3)
Misinformation	Coronavirus mistakes and myths, infodemia in media and social media (n = 2)
The New Normal After COVID-19	The new normal after COVID-19, economic problems (n = 2)

Table 2. Sample quotes from qualitative interviews by theme

These TV discussion programs are composed of one or two moderators and guest health experts or journalists, broadcast in a variety of periods from once a week to every day. In these discussion programs that last between one hour and two and a half hours, the moderators asked questions to the guest scientists such as healthcare experts from the government side, medical doctors, psychologists or other healthcare professionals during the discussions. The guests of the programs were primarily the members of the "Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board" which is a scientific group set up by the Ministry of Health (Cagdas, 2021). TV channels used and emphasized the "Corona Virus Scientific Committee Member" title in their announcements of programs. Many discussion programs hosted the same member of the scientific board on the same day. Besides the scientific committee, we also observed that in some cases the same health experts, such as experienced medical doctors who have a speciality in infectious diseases, and healthcare professionals from the government shared the information on more than one TV channel. Furthermore, some health experts have been labelled as the key information source of COVID-19 and these experts gave statements about the situation on almost each TV channel. Hence, these experts had widespread media coverage and have taken place much more on the TV news instead of other experts. Additionally, in some broadcastings, we observed that medical experts unrelated directly to the COVID-19 have been invited to programs that might be an indicator of the difficulty of finding an available health expert.

Information about COVID-19:

Social situations and the need for health security increase information needs (Wilson, 1981). Based on the information-seeking approach, given information about the virus in the TV discussions was observed over a wide range of variety as in the following sample sentences.

Health experts explain how they reach the sources of virus information and the updated situation of a pandemic. The findings also show that media channels play a significant role to provide information not merely for the public but also health experts such as medical doctors:

> "We have been reading the publications that have been published within the last week. The Chinese have put people in quarantine and tested everyone at 20% of cases under quarantine. No symptoms were found in 20% of the cases. Cardiac symptoms were found in 12%, but no symptoms of the illness, no fever, or anything. They also tested positive (…).What we are faced with here is that there are asymptomatic patients, and they should not be overlooked. They spread the disease rapidly in Italy and China." (Türkiye'nin Nabzı, 17.03.2020)

> "As medical experts, there are lots of cases we have learned from the press and we have been surprised. For example; we all saw the behaviours of those returning from Umrah. Or we all see what happens when we go to see someone who has come from abroad." (Haber Turk, 24.03.2020)

> "Obviously, clinical experiences are critical, but we need to consider that there is something new in this virus that we have faced. Currently, new articles are published

every day, and several new studies have been done and generated new data. The number of articles has exceeded 500, within a month, and each day we have learned new things about the virus." (Tarafsız Bölge, 23.03.2020)

Another health expert used the "Chines virus" label in the statement regarding the virus information update:

> "Two cities in the United States show differences. The virus isolated in Kayseri, Turkey, may be the Chinese virus. There may be other viruses in other cities, we don't know yet." (Küresel Salgın, 30.04.2020)

As some researchers (Garfin et al., 2020; Scopelliti et al., 2021; Tagliabue et al., 2020) suggested, urgent information about the virus, sample cases, precautions and government plans were conveyed throughout the media:

> When a patient comes to the hospital with a fever and cough, there are case definitions in our guide. If they have a fever, cough or respiratory symptoms, and have a history of contact with a Covid patient, it is a possible Covid case for us. (Tarafsız Bölge, 25.03.2020)

> "Using these drugs (....) increases the number of AC2 receptors, and when the number of ac2 receptors increases, and it affects the good content that passes into the blood has a good effect on the lungs and body." (Arka Plan, 15.04.2020)

Experts focus on sharing urgent information immediately through media for public health (Lee&Basnyat, 2013). Nevertheless, even though the given statement below contains virus information in detail, it might be the cause of panic for the public:

> "There are no AC2 receptors in the nose, but once the virus enters to the lungs through the nose and throat, it becomes productive immediately and it affects the whole vascular system. In the vascular system, there is the brain, which is the central nervous system, there is the intestine, there is the cardiovascular system, there are the kidneys, it affects the whole vascular system, and in some patients, these heart attacks can also be seen in the form of strokes, which we call sero-cleakedan. So the virus also affects our vascular system." (Arka Plan, 15.04.2020)

Precautions:

One of the statements given in these TV programs regarding cleaning and hygiene is as follows:

> "Unfortunately, the virus lasts too long on some surfaces. So, we should confine the virus in a closed area. We should air out everything." (Türkiye'nin Nabzı, 26.03.2020)

Two statements regarding informing society on ways of protection and preventive measures in daily life are as follows:

> "We are faced with a highly-infectious virus. This is particularly important. I would like to particularly stress this out. There is more to it than that. OK, it feels like common flu goes with influenza symptoms in some people. But it is highly infectious." (Türkiye'nin Nabzı, 26.03.2020))

"For instance, our guests and visitors from abroad should not contact with people for 14 days, stay at home as much as possible, and wear a mask when going out." (Tarafsız Bölge, 16.03.2020)

Below is an expert's impression of wearing a facemask:

"Facemasks should only be worn by the infected patients who have to go outside. No one around the world recommends wearing a facemask to healthy people." (Tarafsız Bölge, 18.03.2020)

This statement may be associated with incomplete and insufficient information regarding the protectiveness of facemasks at the early stages of the pandemic. This statement also proves that the experts might also have misinformation just as the society at earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Psychological Effects:

An expert has explained the situation which is a health system obstruction due to panic in the early stage of the pandemic:

"This panic that we are experiencing right now is the result of a media campaign that has been launched before. And in the end, panic is more dangerous than the virus. Our health services and health systems have been blocked right now because of this panic."(Tarafsız Bölge, 18.03.2020)

Anwar, et al. (2020) and Parvin et al. (2020) stated that the mass media channels are the most significant sources of information in eliminating panic resulting from the rapid spreading of the COVID-19 virus and resulting in uncertainty. Nevertheless, in some cases, it was merely a statement of eliminating panic in certain circumstances.

"If there are currently 1500 coronavirus cases in Turkey, but there are now 15.000.000 cases of a panic attack." (Tarafsız Bölge, 25.03.2020)

"It may either be you, the journalists, or government authority, or someone from the Ministry of Health. I need someone, who is self-assured, who will inform me regularly, and who will reassure me. I do not want to need anything else with that reassurance." (Tarafsız Bölge, .03.2020)

"As far as I can see from there, constantly talking about this disease, the virus, and its impacts have caused panic among the people. Everyone experiences a panic and talking about some symptoms and whether they should go to the hospital or not." (Tarafsız Bölge, 25.03.2020)

Hobfoll and colleagues (2007) stated that environments of uncertainty or disasters are the times when psycho-social support and mental health are crucial. Receiving social and psychological support in adversity reinforces positive feelings, and brings out a sense of trust, the ability to stay calm, self-sufficiency and social sufficiency, staying in touch, and hope.

"Well, whatever happens, human beings have 3 basic fears. Fundamental fears, we all have them. These cameramen, the audience. First, the fear of death, second, the fear of dying alone, third, uncertainty. Now, this virus has taken us to a place, where we all, including me, have felt the fear of death and dying alone because they take you

away hastily. You are buried hastily as far as I know with no funeral processions because of the fear of infection. The third one is uncertainty. If Mr Ilyas now says no worries, I guarantee that after May 15, COVID will disappear, I think there won't be any problems, but the uncertainty scares the people the most." (Arka Plan, 01.04.2020)

Misinformation:

The inability to reach accurate information regarding a crucial subject about health has increased the stress level.

"I think the most important thing here is protection from false information because in times of pandemics, false and incomplete information becomes deadlier than the disease itself. Please try to reach accurate information. Follow the right sources and share the right information. False information spreads faster in social media. It attracts more attention. We should not be an instrument to this. We should always share accurate information, this is critical. (Türkiye'nin Nabzı, 17.03.2020)

According to Vaezi and Javanmard (2020), the groundless information or news called infodemia cause panic and fear among people, and it complicates the management of pandemic.

"When we hear bad news, we tend to share it with everyone since we want to have our back up. However, on the other hand, our consciousness can see this clearly: My upper human brain can only estimate the potential consequences of spreading this scuttlebutt only when I actually think about it. We should verify any news before we share it, this is the message we want to give. (Tarafsız Bölge, 18.03.2020)

Sometimes things experts say get misunderstood. Yesterday, the Minister said that a person infected 16 people. People have confused this with the contagion coefficient. Actually, that's not what the Minister said. In other words, 1 person infects 3 people on average, and it still does, but 3 people infect another 3 people, and they even gave an example of 30 cases when they said it was another 3 people. We reached up to 30 people with filiation, he said. It does not mean that 1 person infected 30 people at once. (Arka Plan, 07.04.2020)

"A lot of things are being said in these TV programs without getting deeper into the sources of false information; the internet, unfortunately becomes very confusing within this process. (Türkiye'nin Nabzı, 26.03.2020)

"Anxiety is highly contagious, and social media is the most contaminating factor here because it is not a trustworthy source of news. Many people can express their opinions. They can take groundless information and spread them easily. Sure, there is some accurate information too, but false information spread quickly and easily. Thus, it increases anxiety. There are many studies performed after the Zika virus. They show that people become more anxious after they get information from social media. (Arka Plan, 15.04.2020)

"Today, we had an Emergency Physician as our guest. He said, there were people who drink disinfectants and rushed to the emergency." (Tarafsız Bölge, 18.03.2020)

"Please let's do not carry things to extremes in house cleaning and self-cleaning. Now we go beyond the fear of the virus and are carried away with panic and paranoia. We may get poisoned. Someone will be poisoned with chlorine, another one with excessive handwashing, and so on. (Türkiye'nin Nabzı, 26.03.2020)

"It is better than not wearing a mask. That's for sure. If you wash the facemask with soapy water, the mask will become permeable and will no longer protect you." (Küresel Salgın, 01.05.2020)

The New Normal After COVID-19:

The new practices brought by the pandemic will have the potential to become permanent in many aspects of life due to the uncertainty about the pandemic and incoherent and indefinite information about the virus. Therefore, it is observed that information regarding the new life order is given in these TV programs.

> "The post-pandemic world will not be the same again. It has always been the same in the past; all pandemics or plagues have changed the world for good. The world will change. I can even predict some serious problems; we will talk about them if we have time. I can have a mental picture of anti-socialized people. But the only thing I am sure of is that nothing will ever be the same again. (Küresel Salgın, 30.04.2020)

> "We should always remember this: this is the new normal. Our lives will never be the same again. No one will ever say that 'it's over, everything is back to normal, go back to your normal lives.' We should contribute to the normalization of the process knowing all of these (Küresel Salgın, 30.04.2020)

On the other hand, another significant aspect of social life is understanding the economic and social impacts of the precautions against the virus. Elimination of potential uncertainties gains importance in terms of the continuity of social life.

> "Okay, human health is above all, but the people are closing their shops, they have too many problems and issues to deal with." (Tarafsız Bölge, 16.03.2020)

> "The schools, shops, and shopping malls will be opened, but we will be careful and keep our distance from each other. If we have never been infected, we will still be careful. We may have to close our borders to high-risk countries. Until the world is completely done with this illness." (Arka Plan, 07.04.2020)

Discussion

We consider that the COVID-19 pandemic might be a lesson learned in a global context to preserve public health for the next pandemic or health crisis that threatens humanity. Despite the dominance of social media and online platforms during the pandemic, traditional media have had a position in terms of credibility in conveying health information from health authorities (Baraybar-Fernández et al., 2021; Casero-Ripollés, 2020). In the digital age, which dominates almost every part of our lives, our goal was to examine traditional media's role and adaptation to COVID-19 as an emergency.

Our first RQ was what kind of information was primarily shared in TV news programs that focused on the COVID-19 pandemic in order to provide vital health information. Based on our thematic analysis, our findings indicated that a wide range of topics related to COVID-19 has been discussed from the epidemiological characteristics of the virus to the impacts of the pandemic on our lives. Meanwhile, certain topics such as the psychological effects of lockdowns, the new normal, and

basic precautions which were the dominant themes of our analysis were constantly discussed on all channels.

Another finding which might be notable was expressions of a lack of information and uncertainty. In some statements given by health experts, imprecise expressions, particularly about the virus information, precautions, and new life after COVID-19 were obvious. This indicates that the specialists may have information gaps. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that during the broadcasts, delicate or risky information was not filtered appropriately due to the nature of live broadcasts. For example, some experts during the broadcasts used scientific language which might be complicated for the public. According to Lee & Basnyat (2012), health experts primarily engage in sharing vital information with the public immediately during a health crisis which is consistent with our findings. As Gunther (1998) and Snow (2008) stated, in a health crisis, the role of mass media in transmitting scientific information to the people and detailed information about the COVID-19 virus gains prominence.

In order to understand the role of traditional media in reducing health uncertainty which is in our RQ2, we have investigated the cues through our main themes. Our research findings indicate that the conditions with their perpetually changing and growing emergency are consistent with current health uncertainty literature (Brashers, 2001; Mishel,1988; Tandoc & Lee, 2020). Research findings also indicated that uncertainty is a common situation at the early stages of the pandemic which has many ambiguities (Brasher, 2011). Our findings also showed that the questions asked during the air were addressed to daily life implications as well as the virus and its symptoms. As Mishel argues (1988), this is an information-seeking behaviour to reduce health uncertainty in daily life. Health experts were answering moderator's questions and gave information about cleaning and hygiene, social isolation, social distancing, wearing a facemask, nutrition and diet, psychological well-being, and physical activities in news programs for protection against COVID-19. Chunara et al. (2012) stated that public health specialists should have accurate information at the early stages of the pandemic to manage the health crisis.

On the other hand, similar to the studies, which suggest that TV channels are considered reliable sources of information-seeking behaviour towards reducing uncertainty in society (Cho et al., 2015; Dutta-Bergman, 2004), these TV programs played the role in informing society based on this reliability viewpoint. Therefore, this kind of communication of information contributed to the encouragement of senses of trust, staying calm, self-sufficiency, social sufficiency, staying in touch, and hope, as stated by Hobfoll et al., (2007).

To answer RQ3 which was investigating what kind of sources were used to convey information, we have searched sources of information and interaction between sources. Even though the healthcare experts are the primary source of information during the broadcasts, scientific committee members representing the government, psychologists, journalists and other guests such as educational

experts, and academicians were hosted. Unsurprisingly we have found that some of the questions that were asked the guest experts in TV programs came through social media. Moderators were actively using social media during the broadcasts to connect with audiences and to reach some updated data from the media or government. These questions also reflect the efficient role of social media in conveying information about health issues (Gesualdo et al., 2010; Liu et.al., 2020). Hence, this kind of cooperation between traditional media and social media may be an indicator of the effectiveness of collaboration in conveying information about health issues.

Although the effects of the traditional media on individuals' behaviours and attitudes are not precisely included in this study, our theoretical framework advances our understanding of ways of reducing health uncertainty during pandemics. Within the scope of reducing health uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic, our findings are consistent with health uncertainty definitions (Brashers, 2001; Crowley et. al, 2020; Michel,1988; Tandoc & Lee, 2020). However, our analysis revealed that there are vague statements made by guest experts during the broadcasts due to the instability of the situation. This kind of unclear statement might cause ambiguity, fear and panic in public. In addition, Vaezi and Javanmard (2020) found that excessive and unclear information about COVID-19 has caused panic and fear in society, and this has increased the level of panic and anxiety. Due to the nature of the pandemic, the instability of the situation affected the statements during the broadcasts. Therefore, health experts made some explanations which were not proven, such as "wearing the mask in daily life is not necessary". Although the experts made statements to fill the knowledge gap in society, we have also seen that the experts also have a lack of information due to pandemic conditions.

Declaration of the ways of protecting from the virus plays a crucial role in protection from the disease and taking precautions against contagiousness. The findings indicate that the specialists gave information about cleaning and hygiene, social isolation, social distance, wearing a facemask, nutrition and diet, psychological well-being, and physical activities in news programs for protection against COVID-19. Besides, from the beginning of the declaration of the pandemic globally, public health experts have shared the information, precautions and government plans throughout the media (Garfin et al., 2020; Scopelliti et al., 2021; Tagliabue et al., 2020). However, some researchers indicated that the high level of media exposure during the pandemic is associated with negative psychological outcomes and COVID-19-related anxiety (Chao et al., 2020; Liu et.al., 2020; Scopelliti et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Despite the dominance of social media and online platforms during the pandemic, traditional media was streaming with a standpoint in terms of credibility in conveying health information from health authorities and the government.

Our study reveals that in cases that concern public health, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional media continues to play a significant role in meeting the information needs of society, and that the traditional media also uses social media's speed in conveying information. The findings suggest that traditional media's cooperation with social media during the broadcasts is related to the demands of the public which needs immediate action, while also providing evidence of the continued importance of traditional media for credible sources. We also found that the uncertainty and information gaps have also been reflected in TV programs including the information provided by the experts. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic has caused global uncertainty, and it had a swinging course. However, we observed that reliable sources of information, such as the COVID-19 Scientific Committee members, have conveyed new information on a regular basis within the frame of the course of the pandemic via traditional media channels. It is believed that this has allowed for the fulfilment of missing information within the frame of the course of the pandemic.

This study has also several limitations. One source of limitations was the sample size. Due to the maximum size of verbatim transcription, the first 4 most-rated news programs were chosen. Additionally, only TV programs as traditional media sources were chosen for this study. We believe that this paper put a new complexion on traditional media studies for future research with its findings on the cooperation of traditional media and social media. Finally, we suggest that future studies may focus on the interaction of traditional media and social media in meeting information-seeking behaviours and managing uncertainty to acquire more data.

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