**Committee:** GC5

**Issue:** The contribution of the media during the pandemic.

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# The Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights multiple social, cultural, and economic issues arising from the media's controversial role. Media coverage of *coronavirus* news during geographical lockdowns, extended quarantines, and financial and social hardships resulted in fear and caused psychological stress. The media played a worldwide role in coronavirus disease tracking and updates through live updates dashboard. The media allowed for timely interventions by the Center For Disease Control And Prevention and the *World Health Organization*, enabling a rapid and widespread reach of public health communications. We saw an upward trend for the promotion of health and hygiene practices worldwide by the adaption of safe health practices such as increased hand washing, use of face coverings, and adhering to social distancing. Mass media has an important role in today's world and it can provide a common platform for all public health communications, comprehensive healthcare education guidelines, and clear social distancing strategies whilst still maintaining social connections. The role of media and public health communications must be understood and explored further since they will be an essential tool for fighting COVID-19 and future outbreaks.
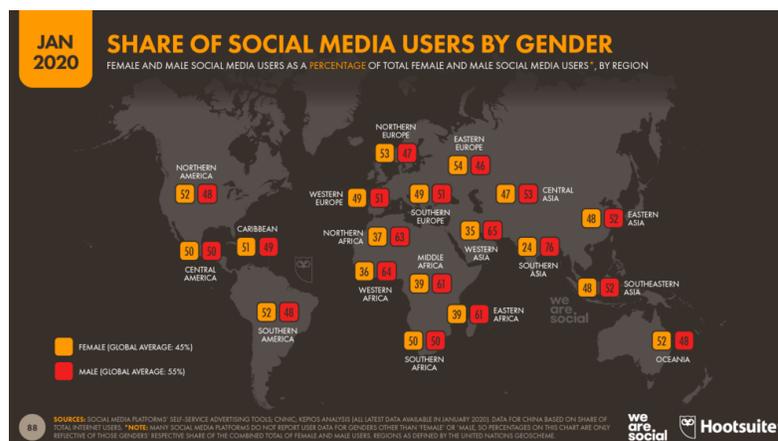
## Background Information:

COVID-19 is a global infectious disease that started in Wuhan in the Hubei province of China in December 2019. As of July 15, 2020, more than 13 million people have been affected by this disease. WHO (World Wide Organization) named the disease as 'COVID-19' and the virus causing it as 'SARS-CoV-2' on Feb 11, 2020. The other members of the family include SARS coronavirus SAR-CoV and MERS coronavirus MERS-CoV. The disease mainly affects the respiratory system and symptoms range from fever, cough, and mild shortness of breath, to severe desaturation, causing respiratory failure. This heterogeneous spectrum of disease is concerning and one of the reasons for the increased fatality of the disease. For most people, it's either the internet or media, which includes print, as well as broadcast options. In an epidemic or pandemic, controlling the spread of disease is a basic requirement. This, in turn, requires the role of varying departments ranging from government to healthcare, to the media, to the general public itself. Whenever a new virus or bacterial disease emerges, it goes through localized transmission, amplification in the spread, and finally, remission with successful measures.

Media reports of the disease spread during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 led to fear and awareness among people. This is an example that indicates that the interaction between media awareness and disease control is a two-directional approach. To study the media impact and disease dynamics, the media impact model was designed after the pandemic of SARS 2003-2004. In the MERS outbreak in 2012, again, the media played its role. The role of social media in the MERS epidemic in 2012 and the H7N9 epidemic in China was studied, showing a stronger reaction in the H7N9 epidemic. This article will examine the role of the media in this COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the general public. In spite of this, renowned world leaders ignorantly kept calling it the "Chinese virus" which left concerning effects in international communities [8,9]. Asian people were stigmatized and called by the name 'Corona' on the streets. Many reported incidents of such racial slurs that exaggerated already existing prejudices among people.

People have gotten used to posting every aspect of their lives on social media. Since the lockdown, there has been an 87% increase in social media usage by the people. People started gathering information posted on the groups and unknown pages and believing them. Religious pages also started attracting people by spreading unscientific information regarding the prevention and treatment of the virus. There were reports of old people being removed from family homes and increased emotional abuse cases among them. Social media spread this spurious information regarding the virus that played with the minds of people who started refuting the importance of social distancing. The critical role of the media is to keep

people connected, well-informed, and entertained. The positive impact of the media was shown in the COVID-19 crisis in promoting emotional stability among people. Many people related to institutions started free online educational activities for kids of various ages. Many different groups were formed, encouraging people in homeschooling with daily postage of worksheets for kids. The CDC's many beneficial guidelines for preventing COVID-19 were reinforced among people through prominent advertisements on commonly used social media platforms.

It uses a wide array of technologies like audio-video sessions, telephonic discussions, and integrated clinical information systems to help deal with problems faced by sick people in the community. People became scared of going to hospitals even for major problems. A helpline was also set up which enable people to decide whether their symptoms accounted for COVID-19 testing. This specifically did the damage of spreading false information regarding the virus and additionally persuaded beliefs in simple enigmatic treatments, thus causing people to become careless and assist the spread of the disease. Grief and bereavement of losing known people are being recognized. It established record-based data of affected people and deaths.

## **Involved Countries and Organisations:**

During the coronavirus pandemic, the media has played a key role in keeping up to date with COVID-19 developments both domestically and outside of Spain's borders. In fact, according to a survey carried out during the first week of April 2020, approximately a quarter of the Spanish population indicated that the media had done its job in explaining to people how to deal with the situation. However, around 30% of the people who were surveyed stated that the information which was shared by the media at times was also an exaggerated position of the pandemic.

While all Member States are severely affected in health and economic terms, in some countries, including Spain, the effects of the disease and the consequences of lockdowns on employment or the outlook for the recovery and the sustainability of public finances are particularly severe. In light of the many risks, it is necessary to develop a negotiating strategy that takes these dangers into account, identifies objectives and lives up to expectations of a constructive relationship between Spain and the EU, both internally and at the European level. Additionally, it has been observed that National health systems in almost all Member States, particularly in countries like Italy, Spain, France, and the Benelux states, were unprepared for a pandemic of this scale. In terms of Spain, while the country has shown some weakness in the area of health, its position is especially delicate as regards the impending recession.
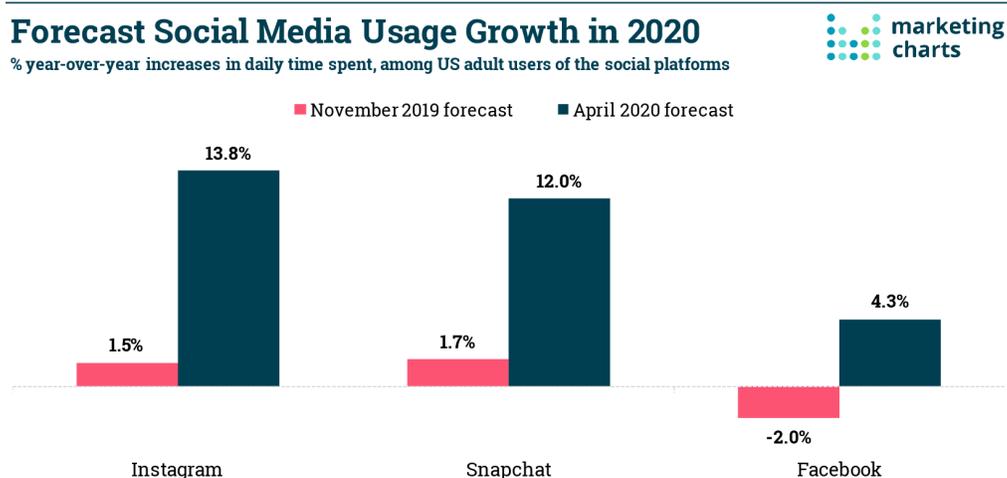
There are a number of reasons for this, including the role of tourism in the country's economy, the high level of unemployment and lack of permanent jobs in the run-up to the crisis, and the country's high level of debt, which creates an obstacle to providing stimulus and makes European financial support vital. The EU's role in managing the health and economic dimensions of the crisis has been politicised in Spain, an aspect that is both positive, since it can be seen as a sign of maturity, and negative, since it shows the ever-fragile legitimacy of the integration process. All these pan-European measures will have profound social and economic consequences for Spain in areas such as its national health system, science, innovation, industry and also the security system. Spanish interests in the economic response The economic policies adopted by the EU will be important when it comes to reducing the economic impact of the pandemic and taking advantage of the crisis as an opportunity to build a more integrated EU, with a more robust monetary union, which has always been among Spain's key priorities.

Since the start of March, Spain, France and Italy, alongside Belgium, Slovenia, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal, have been arguing for a response based on eurobonds, which would avoid increasing existing national debt and would not mean having to accept politically unacceptable conditionality. On 19 April the Spanish government presented 'Spain's non-paper on a European recovery strategy', which outlines provisions to create a recovery fund of up to €1.5 trillion. Spain must pay close attention to the small print to make sure that its businesses get sufficient funds and their headquarters do not end up transferred to the other Member States.

Regardless of whether the Commission's proposal is satisfactory to Spain and even though it will help make debt more sustainable and represents a strong starting point in political terms, it is important not to overestimate the potential of its impact on the management of the crisis in the aftermath of the pandemic. While the battle over eurobonds has not been won, both due to deeply-rooted legal objections and because the idea did not fully coincide with the interests of Spain, France and Italy, the ECB's unconditional support and the prospect of permanently increasing the European budget represent significant progress. Spain must continue to insist that the European recovery plan does not allow the crisis to exacerbate divergences between countries and regions along a North-South divide and that it truly embodies the ideas of a 'Europe that protects' and a 'social Europe', side-lined over the last decade and increasingly demanded by its citizens. These objectives must also be supported by a major political consensus at the national level and ensuring Spain has projects ready in these areas to receive financing when funds become available. If the ideal outcome of making fiscal decisions by qualified majority voting in the area of tax -which should be the aspiration of Spain and is expressly stated in its non-paper of 19 April- is not achieved,

there should be the possibility of strengthened cooperation, excluding countries that fail to cooperate.

Mediterranean countries like Spain could benefit from and contribute to Europe's climate neutrality in 2050. All Europeans would win through measures allowing Spain to capitalise on its potential for renewable energy in the medium term by strengthening its electricity links with France and the cooperation mechanisms for the exchange of renewable energy.

**Forecast Social Media Usage Growth in 2020**
% year-over-year increases in daily time spent, among US adult users of the social platforms

marketing charts

■ November 2019 forecast    ■ April 2020 forecast

| | Instagram | Snapchat | Facebook |
|---|---|---|---|
| November 2019 forecast | 1.5% | 1.7% | -2.0% |
| April 2020 forecast | 13.8% | 12.0% | 4.3% |

## Timeline of Events:
- In January 2021, the TikTok platform only had 689 million users. That's a 45% increase in less than a year.
- TikTok surpassed the 1 billion user mark in September 2021. That made it the 7th most popular social network in the world.
- June 26, 2020 - During a virtual media briefing, WHO announces that it plans to deliver about 2 billion doses of a coronavirus vaccine to people across the globe. One billion of those doses will be purchased for low- and middle-income countries, according to WHO.

## Previous Attempts at Solving this Issue:
The unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how the spread of misinformation, amplified on social media and other digital platforms, is proving to be as much a threat to global public health as the virus itself. To better understand how young adults are engaging with technology during this global communication crisis, an international study was conducted, covering approximately 23,500 respondents, aged 18-40 years, in 24 countries across five continents. With data collected from late October 2020 to early January

2021, the outcomes provide key insights on where Gen Z and Millennials seek COVID-19 information, who they trust as credible sources, their awareness and actions around false news, and what their concerns are. Although young people are less at risk of severe disease from COVID-19, they are a key group in the context of this pandemic and share in the collective responsibility to help us stop transmission. However, the same tools also enable and amplify the current infodemic that continues to undermine the global response and jeopardizes measures to control the pandemic. Technology advancements and social media create opportunities to keep people safe, informed, and connected. They are also the most active online, interacting with an average number of 5 digital platforms (such as, Twitter, TikTok, WeChat, and Instagram) daily. This project was a collaboration between the World Health Organization (WHO), Wunderman Thompson, the University of Melbourne and Pollfish.

WHO wants young people to be informed about COVID-19 information, navigate their digital world safely, and make choices to not only protect their health but also the health of their families and communities. These insights can help health organizations, governments, media, businesses, educational institutions, and others sharpen their health communication strategies. Beyond getting sick themselves, the top concern of respondents (55.5%) was the risk of friends and family members contracting COVID-19, closely followed by the economy crashing (53.8%).

## Possible Solutions:

There are several alternatives to deal with falsehoods and disinformation that can be undertaken by various organizations. Many of these ideas represent solutions that combat fake news and disinformation without endangering freedom of expression and investigative journalism.

1) **Government responsibilities**
   a) One of the most important thing governments around the world can do is to encourage independent, professional journalism.
   b) Governments should avoid crackdowns on the news media's ability to cover the news. Those activities limit freedom of expression and hamper the ability of journalists to cover political developments.
   c) Governments should avoid censoring content and making online platforms liable for misinformation. This could curb free expression, making people hesitant to share their political opinions for fear it could be censored as fake news.

2) **News industry actions**
   a) The news industry should continue to focus on high-quality journalism that builds trust and attracts greater audiences. An encouraging development is that

many news organizations have experienced major gains in readership and viewership over the last couple of years, and this helps to put major news outlets on a better financial footing.

b) It is important for news organizations to call out fake news and disinformation without legitimizing them. In order to educate users about news sites that are created to mislead, nonprofit organizations such as Politifact, Factcheck.org, and Snopes judge the accuracy of leader claims and write stories detailing the truth or lack thereof of particular developments.

    i) Research by Dartmouth College Professor Brendan Nyhan has found that labeling a Facebook post as "Disputed" reduces the percentage of readers believing the false news by 10 percentage points.

3) **Technology company responsibilities**

a) Technology firms should invest in technology to find fake news and identify it for users through algorithms and crowdsourcing. There are innovations in fake news and hoax detection that are useful to media platforms.

    i) Former FCC Commissioner Tom Wheeler argues that "Public interest algorithms" can aid in identifying and publicizing fake news posts and therefore be a valuable tool to protect consumers. His conclusion is that "When combining meta-data with text, significant improvements can be achieved for fine-grained fake news detection." In a similar approach, Eugenio Tacchini and colleagues say it is possible to identify hoaxes with a high degree of accuracy.

b) These companies shouldn't make money from fake news manufacturers and should make it hard to monetize hoaxes. It is important to weaken financial incentives for bad content, especially false news and disinformation, as the manufacturing of fake news is often financially motivated. Like all clickbait, false information can be profitable due to ad revenues or general brand-building.

    i) During the 2016 presidential campaign, trolls in countries such as Macedonia reported making a lot of money through their dissemination of erroneous material.

    ii) While social media platforms like Facebook have made it harder for users to profit from fake news, ad networks can do much more to stop the monetization of fake news, and publishers can stop carrying the ad networks that refuse to do so.

c) Strengthen online accountability through stronger real-name policies and enforcement against fake accounts. This makes it easier to hold individuals accountable for what they post or disseminate online and also stops people

from hiding behind fake names when they make offensive comments or engage in prohibited activities.

    i)    This is relevant to fake news and misinformation because of the likelihood that people will engage in worse behavior if they believe their actions are anonymous and not likely to be made public.

**d) Educational institutions**

    i)    Funding efforts to enhance news literacy should be a high priority for governments. This is especially the case with people who are going online for the first time. For those individuals, it is hard to distinguish false from real news, and they need to learn how to evaluate news sources, not accept at face value everything they see on social media or digital news sites. Helping people become better consumers of online information is crucial as the world moves towards digital immersion.

## Key Terms:

*Infodemic: An excessive amount of information about a problem that is typically unreliable, spreads rapidly, and makes a solution more difficult to achieve.*

*Telemedicine: the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients by means of telecommunications technology.*

*Media: The main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the internet) regarded collectively.*

*Fanfare: Information in newspapers and on television and radio intended to make people interested in someone or something*

*Limelight: A situation in which you are getting a lot of interest and attention from the newspapers, television etc*

*Overexposure: A situation in which someone or something appears so much in newspapers, on television, on the radio etc that people lose interest*

## Modern Day Examples:

Ever since the Coronavirus outbreak, people have been more engaged with media and its different branches. People have discovered that social media is a great way for people to be connected over a computer screen. Media has a great effect on people and mentally persuades them into thinking certain things and doing certain things or take action.

Firstly, some people used media to spread falsehoods, including miracle preventative measures, false claims about the implementation of martial law, conspiracy theories, and more. Finding trusted sources of information regarding COVID-19 was challenging. Distinguishing between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources on media became more important than ever During a pandemic, the best rule of thumb for making sure information on media is accurate is to check original sources and make sure that those sources are indeed trustworthy, and the information was relayed accurately. Just because someone claims to have learned something from a reliable source doesn't mean they're relaying that information accurately.
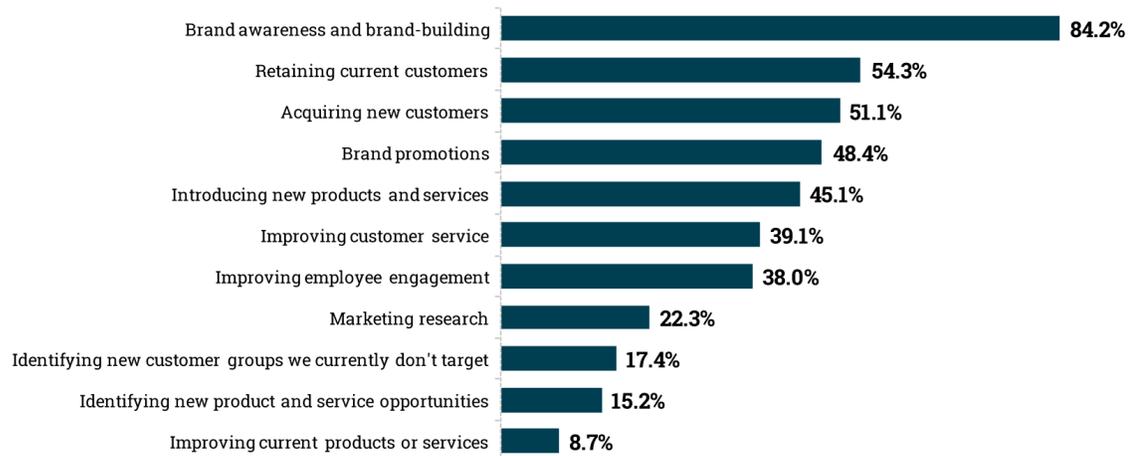
Secondly, billions of people are free to publicly share their opinions regarding a pandemic through various social media platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw individuals, organizations, and businesses use social media to spread awareness of the virus, as well as the public actions that can be taken. Here are a few of the most distinct ways social media influenced the public throughout the COVID-19 pandemic: Social distancing and home quarantine became trends Until COVID-19, many of us hadn't even heard of "Social distancing," which refers to staying at least 6 feet away from others to help prevent the spread of infection. Soon after the world went into lockdown, social media users, from friends and family to celebrities and governments called for social distancing and encouraged people to stay strong during their home quarantines. One of the benefits of social media during a pandemic is that it enables this type of helpful and supportive information to easily be shared to a wide audience. Many brands and organizations also came up with fun ways to engage with people on social media, such as the Getty Museum asking people to recreate works of art using items found in their homes. The impact of social media on culture was never more profound than it was during the COVID-19 pandemic. On social media, we saw panic buying discussed in two distinct ways: 1) people posting about their own panic buying, showing images of carts filled with toilet paper, water bottles, and frozen meals; and 2) people posting pictures of empty shelves or other people's carts as a way to shame supposed panic buyers.

Lastly, while we saw misinformation and fear on social media, there was also an abundance of lifesaving information, connections with others, and global unity. Social media gave us the ability to share experiences with family and friends to help combat both literal and emotional

isolation while also reminding us that we're all in this together. Here are a few of the ways that social media made positive impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic: People posted pictures and videos to share their experiences After an initial challenging transition period, many people began embracing quarantine culture on social media. Posts from people quarantined at home ranged from videos of living room yoga to pictures of snuggly pets who were thrilled to have their owners with them 24/7. We also saw posts acknowledging how difficult and frightening this time was. Posts ranged from commiseration to overwhelming support. These are just a couple of the millions of examples where people showed their support and empathy on social media. There is still a lot to learn about the impact of social media during a pandemic This is the first time any living generation has experienced a pandemic of this scale, and we're just beginning to understand social media's ultimate role.

## CMOs' Use of Social Media During COVID-19
**"For what purposes has your firm used social media during the pandemic?"**

marketing charts

| Purpose | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Brand awareness and brand-building | 84.2% |
| Retaining current customers | 54.3% |
| Acquiring new customers | 51.1% |
| Brand promotions | 48.4% |
| Introducing new products and services | 45.1% |
| Improving customer service | 39.1% |
| Improving employee engagement | 38.0% |
| Marketing research | 22.3% |
| Identifying new customer groups we currently don't target | 17.4% |
| Identifying new product and service opportunities | 15.2% |
| Improving current products or services | 8.7% |

## Useful Links:
- https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-to-combat-fake-news-and-disinformation/
- https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/social-media-covid-19-a-global-study-of-digital-crisis-interaction-among-gen-z-and-millennials
- https://www.vox.com/recode/22295131/social-media-use-pandemic-covid-19-instagram-tiktok
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