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Tale of two videos: Frame and narrative structure analysis of two COVID-19 communication social media messages

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus prevention efforts both protect the people who engage in them and promote the welfare of society. However, often not facts and information, but emotions drive the risk perceptions. Emotions influence our reasoning and impact on our behaviours. To tide over the COVID 19 epidemic, all people must abide by certain practices, ranging from easy to observe, but annoying, hand washing to more socially disruptive physical distancing. Lockdowns, curfews and other political and administrative measures make additional demands. Using frame and narrative structure analysis, in this paper, we examine two videos, prepared by the Kerala and Tamil Nadu police personnel for social media dissemination. Using the frame analysis methodology and narrative structure analysis, we explore the frames, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages encoded in the selected two videos and draw inferences on the influence it can have on the audiences.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Frame analysis, Narrative structure analysis, Social networks, Public health messages, Risk communication, Infodemic

Introduction

The world is witnessing an unprecedented SARS-CoV-2 (Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) infection and the COVID-19 (COrona VIrus Disease 2019) pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic may be one of the most significant modern societal challenges that require widespread collective action and cooperation. With a handful of actions, some simple, vigilant hand washing, donning a facial mask, and some demanding and disruptive, keeping physical distancing and be ready for self-

isolation, if having flu-like symptoms, we can help reduce the infection spread. The efficacy of public health messages to motivate behavioural change is crucial for successfully combatting the massive public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research into the trajectories of public psycho-behavioural responses relating influenza show that 'social norm-related cues could be important contributors of emotional responses to an epidemic that subsequently motivates protective behavioural responses' and that 'communication through social networks during an epidemic is important to regulate public emotional response and guide desirable behavioural change among the public' (Liao, Wu, Wing Tak Lam, Cowling, & Fielding, 2019).

Here, we explore two different types of public health messages, one that graphically taps into people's fear and one that highlights the welfare of society, using the narrative and frame analysis frameworks two public communication videos, one prepared and released by the Social Media Cell of the Kerala Police (hereinafter referred as KP video)(Kerala Police, 2020) and the other by enthusiastic police personnel from Tiruppur, a manufacturing town in Tamilnadu (hereinafter referred as TP video) (Tamil Nadu Police, 2020). We do not know if the short film released by the police personnel from Tiruppur has the formal official sanction of the authorities. Nevertheless both the film became viral, repeatedly shown in many television channels, and shared widely on social media including messaging app like WhatsApp.

Neither aggravating of public fear nor deepening of public distrust of risk management is the primary task of risk communication. How far do the messages and narratives found in the select social media communication messages magnify fright and advance public trust over state health, police and disaster management institutions? As dealing with the pandemic is going to be a long haul, what key lessons can we learn?

As the novel coronavirus infection and COVID-19 spread beyond China, most countries have imposed national emergencies, closed the borders and severely restricted free movement. In India the provision of epidemic act and national

disaster act has been invoked to declare an unprecedented national lockdown from March 23, 2020, to contain the pandemic. Curfew provisions have also been imposed and assembly of four or more people has been banned. Unlike natural disasters like earthquake or tsunami, the emergency declared is neither localised nor displays any visible signs of disasters. The pandemic is invisible, but the exceptional response to the nationwide lockdown is spectacular and phenomenal. The crisis is strange, remote, and the threat is beyond comprehension and control of the lay public. Obscure, but larger than life risks evoke strong emotions.

Beyond the disease itself, fear and misinformation loom large during a pandemic. The term infodemic has been coined to outline the perils of misinformation phenomena during the management of epidemics. "We're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at the Munich Security Conference on February 15 (World Health Organization, 2020). The information environment around a pandemic underscores the importance of effective science communication to promote desired behaviours among the public.

In contemporary times, not only the traditional mass media such as newspapers and television but social media platforms such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter as well as instant messaging services like WhatsApp have gained more traction. While the traits of direct access, providing instant and swift access to information of the social media platform are its strengths, ability to circulate an unprecedented amount of content without any sort of editorial oversight has the potential to amplify rumours and questionable information. With the considerable traction it receives in the Indian media landscape, social media has edged out newspapers and occupies the seat of agenda-setting of the media.

The information that gets amplified and the narrative frame in which it is encased can strongly influence the public and in turn, mediate the evolution of public debate and shape the public response to countermeasures deployed by governments. A large part of the false or misleading information drives fear, leading to 'othering', discrimination & violence against stigmatised or

scapegoated groups (Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014; Schaller & Neuberg, 2012). Fake news advocating unproven remedies provokes false optimism that may induce people to ignore public health warnings. Studies show, "engagement in social distancing and handwashing was most strongly predicted by the perceived likelihood of personally being infected" (Wise, Zbozinek, Michelini, Hagan, & Mobbs, 2020).

A significant challenge before the communicators during the COVID-19 pandemic is to find an appropriate balance, between making the messages positive, that is giving hope, without inducing unfounded 'optimism bias' and creating excessive feelings of anxiety and dread but at the same time being mindful of the threat of the contagion.

Materials and Methods

Materials

The study is a qualitative study of two hand-picked videos, TP video and KP video in the narrative and frame analysis. The choice of these two is intentional. The aim is to contrast and juxtapose two broad approaches, draw lessons for policymakers and help reflect on the part of the communicators. One cannot generalise the COVID-19 communication landscape with these two contrasting case studies. Nonetheless, the value of the qualitative approach is in bringing to gaze the explanatory framework of what goes on in the situated organisations.

TP video

In this enactment video created by the Tiruppur police three bikers are seen driving in the street, without a mask. The jolly ride of these three bikers comes to a halt when police officials stop them. Branded lockdown violators they are dragged into a waiting ambulance. Yes, ambulance. That is the twist in this tale. The ambulance is not empty; the camera shows a man lying down on a stretcher with full protective gear, suggesting that he is suffering from COVID-19.

The youths, fearing for their lives, beg the police to not pack them off in that ambulance. The youngsters fall on the feet of the

policemen, cry and implore, but the police are firm; the lockdown violators must be punished. They should set an example. The youths are dragged and bundled into the waiting ambulance. The step has been taken to create fear among lockdown violators so that they do not loaf around.

KP video

The video made by the Kerala police is poles apart. This too is an enactment video, with all the roles of the characters played by the police staff. The storyline of the video is a spoof of a Malayalam blockbuster movie, *Lucifer*, in particular a song sequence, 'Kadavule Pole' [like God, lit trans]. The protagonist imitates the moves and dialogue of Mohanlal, star actor in the film.

The protagonist, a common man, clad in a lungi and T-shirt is shown to be carelessly loitering in an empty road. Unexpectedly, he encounters the 'virus' [created using VFX]. The virus is animated, happy to see the protagonist. The virus starts to chase him. Startled, the shocked hero is scared and runs to save his life. Suddenly the hero stops running and turns to face the virus. He folds and tucks his dhoti and twirls his moustache. The background score is now set to the cine song, kadavulai pola. As the camera zooms out, we see in the background a policeman, a medical professional (a male nurse or a ward boy) standing with sanitiser and face masks. Both the police and the medical professionals are beaming with confidence and smiling. They offer the hero the sanitiser and give him a mask. After sanitising his hands and wearing a mask, the man is now ready to take on the virus that he was fleeing from earlier. With the help of the police and medical professionals, the video shows the man being empowered to fight the infection. Released as part of the 'Break the Chain' campaign by the Kerala government, the awareness video inspires, instils hope and seeks a public behaviour without invoking fear.

Methods

The frame analysis focuses on how a story has been told by that storyteller. It looks at why it is told that way, what solutions are

offered, what alternate frames could have been used, what are the consequences of presenting events 'framed' in one way rather than another. The narrative discourse analysis looks at the roles allocated to the 'actors' (or characters) in the story, who is held as 'responsible', what moral standards are appealed to in the way the story is narrated.

Framing

The notion that the effect of the messages is not a simple function of content differences but differences in the modes of presentation underlies the notion of 'framing' in media studies. It is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterised can have a significant influence on how audiences understand it. Thus, any representation of reality involves 'framing'. As Nisbet observes, "there is no such thing as unframed information" (Nisbet & Newman, 2015, pp. 316). Communicators are adept at framing, whether using frames intentionally or intuitively.

Framing refers to the process whereby we organise reality – categorising events in particular ways, paying attention to some aspects rather than others, deciding what experience or event means or how it came about. Framing is loosely defined as "information that conveys differing perspectives on some event or issue" (Goffman, 1974). Goffman described framing as a method by which individuals apply interpretative schemas to both classify and interpret the information that they encounter in tier day-to-day lives. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) saw frames as "a central organising idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, pp. 143). Entman says framing highlights certain aspects of the world "as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, pp. 52). Reese states "Frames are organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2001, pp. 11) . Just a collection of trees does not make a forest. Likewise, a set of information does not make a 'story'. In a nutshell, frames provide

meaning about social phenomena through highlighting and packaging of information in a 'story'.

The idea of 'bias' and the notion of 'framing' are not synonymous. Even an unbiased account of social life involves 'framing' of social reality. The framing is not a subjective error that is caused by the individual's inattention or stupidity. It is also not about uncovering faulty or erroneous information in the reporting. Fact-checks on hoaxes and fake news provide that. It is an objective cultural-psychological phenomenon, akin to Geist, a collective representation of social reality, caused by cultural forces and factors that falsify consciousness. No society is monolithic. Various social classes vie to articulate, and the frame analysis makes visible "the struggle over the production or mobilising and counter-mobilising of ideas and meanings" (Snow & Benford, 2000, pp. 3), and thereby reveals the social structure, power relations, which most often are beyond our perception.

Frame analysis: To unpack the process through which a frame is presented, media and communication studies deploy frame analysis, a technique to understand how a story has been told by that storyteller, why it is told that way, who is held 'responsible', what solutions are offered, what alternate frames could have been used. The frame analysis would also examine how the key players of the story are presented, and what are the consequences of presenting events 'framed' in one way rather than another.

Frame analysis uses either issue-specific frames identified from a set of media reporting on the issue or uses generic frames. We have selected only two narratives for analysis. Hence it is not reasonable to identify issue-specific frames prevalent in the Indian media landscape. So, we adopt Iyengar (Iyengar, 1991) & (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) generic frames for the analysis (Table 1).

Table 1: **Generic frames**

S. No.	Frame	Framing aspect
1.	Conflict frame	Conflict between individuals, groups or institutions is emphasized.

2.	Human Interest frame	The human or emotional perspective is emphasized, reflecting a personalized view and dramatizations of the issues.
3.	Economic consequence frame	The economic consequences for an individual, group, institution, region or country is the main focus.
4.	Morality frame	Ethical, moral or religious aspects are emphasized, with prescriptions on how to act according to a specific code of conduct.
5.	Responsibility frame	An issue or problem is presented in such a way as to attribute responsibility for a cause or solution to an individual group, institution or government.

Adopted from (Ferré, Sorribes, & Collantes, 2018)

Narrative structure

Every story when told adopts a narrative structure, either consciously chosen or unwittingly adopted by the storyteller. Summarizing Gallie's definition, Ricoeur says that a story "describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both. This response to the new situation leads the story toward its conclusion" (Ricoeur, McLaughlin, & Pellauer, 2013, pp. 150). On the other hand, a narrative is a storytelling, that is, as a way of ordering events and thoughts in a coherent sequence that makes them interesting to listen to.

Very often, the communicators do not explicitly narrate the story in the first person, as the narrator of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, and tell in the third person from the omniscient point of view. It is true as far as journalistic stories in general and communication related to the pandemic, in particular are concerned. Nevertheless, the 'plot', by which the information is fixed with each other to bring them into a meaningful whole makes even the 'third person' recital into a narrative.

Furthermore, the journalist's use of adjectives kindles emotions in the reader (audience). This means that journalistic texts also incorporate a value system through which reality is constructed.

Narrative structural analysis: Narrative analysis is a genre of analytic frames whereby researchers interpret stories that are told within the context of research and/or are shared in everyday life. Since culture operates symbolically, an analysis of texts/visuals allows revealing the narrative structure and the social and political values underpinning them. Journalism, mass media communication, as well as social media presentations are informative narrative and the narrative structure analysis helps us understand the contours of the unstated but implicit, political and social values driving these messages. The analysis explores the structure, functions and the substance of a story told in a particular way.

What are the narrative roles allocated to each of the 'actants'? What are the objectives that these actants strive for within the narrative plot? What actions do they perform when the story is told? These are some of the questions that are examined in the narrative structure analysis. In the analysis, firstly the narrative roles allocated to each actant are teased out. It may be kept in mind that a single 'actant' or character in the plot may perform several narrative roles in one plot. We use the classification of narrative roles from narrative semiotics as developed by Collantes (Table 2). Secondly, the objectives that these actants pursue within the particular narration and the actions they perform are disentangled.

Table 2: Conceptual categories of narrative role of actants

S. No.	Character	Narrative role
1.	Action subject	The character that performs an action in order to achieve a certain objective.
2.	Beneficiary of the action	The character that benefits from or is prejudiced by the action of the action subject.
3.	Mission-setter	The character that requires the Performer to seek out an objective.
4.	Assistant	The character that helps the Performer to achieve his objective.

5.	Opponent	The character that hinders the action of the Performer and makes it difficult for him to achieve his objective.
6.	Rival	The character that strives for the same objective as the Performer of the action and is in competition with him.
7.	Recognizer of the action	The character that, at the end of the plot, is either grateful for or critical of the action subject's action.

Adopted from (Collantes, Obradors, Pujadas, Ferrés, & Pérez, 2011)

Analysis

Frame analysis

Framing items and slant of each narrative are tabulated in Table 3. The slant (or the nuance) is evaluated as positive if the positive aspects of the event are emphasised, negative if the negative aspect is emphasised and neutral if it is either an accurate description or the slant is not easy to make out. For example, the protagonist's act of teaming up with the police and medical professionals to take on the virus is a positive description of the protagonist behaviour. However, the bikers' actions are admonished and presented in a negative light.

Table 3: A frame analysis of the two videos

Frame / Framing items	TP video	KP video
Attribution of responsibility		
Does the story suggest govt as the ability to alleviate the problem	Yes Positive slant	Yes Positive slant
Does it suggest any responsibility of the government	Yes Positive slant	Yes Positive slant
Does it suggest solutions	Yes Negative slant	Yes Positive slant
Are the individual/ group held responsible	Yes Negative slant	Yes Positive slant
Does the story say that the problem requires urgent action	Yes Positive slant	Yes Positive slant

Human interest frame		
A human face to the issue	Yes Negative slant	Yes Positive slant
How the groups are individuals are affected	Yes Negative slant	Yes Positive slant
Does the narrative generate a feeling of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion	Yes negative slant	Yes Positive slant
Do the visual elements generate a feeling of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy or compassion	Yes Negative	Yes Positive slant
Are the private and personal life of the actors depicted	No ambiguous	No Ambiguous
Morality frame		
Does it have moral messages	Yes Negative slant	Yes Positive slant
Are there any reference to morality, God and other religious tenants	No	No
Does it make any social prescription	Yes Positive slant	Yes Positive slant

Narrative analysis

The key narrative roles and the objectives and actions of the key characters in the plot are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Allocation of narrative roles & objectives and activities of main characters in two videos

	TP Video	KP Video
Common man/ bikers		
Narrative role	Opponent Although cast as individuals, implicitly portrayed as representing the 'public'.	Action subject Although cast as an individual, implicitly portrayed as representing the 'public'.

Action	Creates the threat by going in public during curfew without a mask. The potential harm caused by action is ethical (by way of being potential COVID-19 carrier) and political (by not subjugating to the public order)	Teams up with police & medical professionals to fight the virus contagion, practices the recommended safety protocols to stop the spread of the virus.
Objectives	Callous, self-gratification, violates curfew for 'fun'.	Obtains a safe and secure life in the context of a pandemic.
Police official		
Narrative role (s)	Action subject & disapproving sanctioner. Although individuals are depicted, they stand for the institution of the police.	Proposer. Although individuals are depicted, they stand for the institution of the police.
Action	Enforces the curfew, law, regulation and punish the guilty.	Teams up with the action subject & medical professionals to help the public practice pandemic health advice.
Objectives	Stop the spread of the contagion by upholding the curfew.	Stops the spread of the contagion.
Medical professional		
Narrative role	Assistant	Assistant
Action	Helps the police punish by confining the bikers with a COVID 19 patient.	Teams up with police to help the action subject practice pandemic hygiene protocols.
Objectives	To assist police in enforcing the curfew.	Assist the action subject in practising pandemic hygiene measures.
The virus/ Pandemic		
Narrative role	Absent	Opponent. The character is an abstract, natural element.
Action		Threatens the action subject. The potential harm of the character is existential.

Objective		Infect the action subject and spread to others in the community.
The COVID 19 patient		
Narrative role	Assistant	Not present
Action	Helps the police to mete out the punishment, by direct threat of infecting the opponent.	
Objective	Kill or at least infect and cause harm to the opponent.	
The State (political administration)		
Narrative role (s) This character is not present directly in the narration but could be implied in both the films.	Mission-setter The contractual manipulation involves threat and effect of the manipulation is provoking obligations to follow pandemic health practices.	Mission-setter & approving sanctioner. The contractual manipulation is a promise, and the effect of the manipulation is provoking obligation to follow pandemic health practices.
Action	Empower the police to take stringent action against violators of curfew and epidemic Act to protect the society.	As sanctioner recognise the action subject positively. Empower the public to stay safe, break the chain, & protect the society
Objective	Protect society by curtailing the spread of the virus.	Protect society by curtailing the spread of the virus.

Key Findings

Stroking fear rather than kindling hope

Public health messages designed to facilitate compliance have often used emotional language to elicit compliance. While the KP video highlights the welfare of society and appeals to positive prosocial (everyone's actions help society) emotions, the TP video strokes the negative fear appeal (violating the curfew could lead to horrible death).

Epidemiologists concerned with the basic rate of reproduction (R0) and the dispersion rate of the novel coronavirus suggested lockdown intending to 'flatten the curve', that is reduce the pace of the spread of the virus and use that time to augment the health infrastructure. Lockdown is not a health measure to eliminate the viral pandemic. Nonetheless, wrongly interpreting lockdown as a health measure to arrest the pandemic, anxious media attempted to instil fear of death to keep the citizens at home.

Intimidating images of the COVID-19 were circulated fanning further the flame of fear. Images of 'men dying like flies, caskets with dead bodies buried in mass graves' were the narrative theme of the coverage of pandemic in China and Italy. Many of these were indeed misinformation or plain hoax. A still from a TV show, *Grey's Anatomy* was presented as medical staff in Italy dying like flies in hospitals, fake news that Russia had unleashed more than 500 lions on its streets to ensure that people stayed indoors, disturbing video images of a funeral procession for pilgrims who died during the annual Haj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia presented as video clip of victim's bodies removed from Iran hospital by military trucks, residents gathering to get free vegetables passed on as residents queuing for death certificates in Wuhan, a fake video purporting to be the Dutch Air Force disinfecting the entire country with helicopters – all contributed to the climate of terror and hysteria. The TP video snugly fits into the genre.

Unleashing pandemic of hate

The portrayal of the COVID-19 patient in the TP film is negative. The characterisation does not win the sympathy of the audience, but it evokes terror and repulsion. The climate of hate emerging amid the COVID-19 pandemic forced the WHO to say, "Having COVID-19 is not anybody's fault. Every case is a victim and every case needs to be treated with sensitivity, as the health workers who treat them. So it's very important that we are not profiling COVID-19 along racial, along religious, along ethnic lines. This is not helpful" (World Health Organisation, 2020).

War against COVID 19 and agency of the citizens

It can be readily seen that the common person (in both videos depicted by 'men') have a diametrically opposite role in the narrative discourse. While in the TP video the common men, pictured as the truant bikers, play the role of an opponent, in the KP video he is the active subject. The agency is not robbed out of the 'ideal' public in the KP video, while the ideal public imagined in the TP video is one without any agency, except adhering to the orders from the State. For winning the war against COVID-19, the TP video suggests passivity of the public, while the KP video treats the virus and the pandemic as the opponent, and seeks partnership and an active role in 'breaking the chain'.

Do not get and do not spread it: Prosocial motivation

In the case of the KP video, 'war against COVID-19' is against the pandemic. The video is part of the more extensive campaign launched in Kerala – 'break the chain'. The idea is simple, as we wash our hands (at that time, physical distancing was not so much emphasised) and don a mask, we do not transmit the virus to another person. The act of mask and hand sanitisation is not just to save oneself, but ensure that we do not accidentally transmit to others. As we break the chain of transmission, the campaign claims the enemy will be weakened. All citizens join hands with the police and medical fraternity in this 'war' against COVID-19. The framing of the video is 'prosocial', and the narrative 'ethical', calling for action that would help everyone.

Discussion

Framing and narrative structures shape the presentation of public health information which informs the community's perception of risk and potential behaviour. In this sense, the public attitude and behaviours correlate with the framing of the messages. The desired behavioural change in the common public – vigilant hand washing, wearing a mask, willing self-isolation, not engaging in usual activities – involve a considerable cost to the actors. Coronavirus prevention behaviours can reasonably be conceptualised as either self-interested actions (that are

undertaken for their direct benefits to the actor) or as cooperative efforts (that are worthwhile only when considering their benefits to society). Which framing is best, 'do not get it' (framed around benefit to the individual), 'do not spread it' (as a benefit to others), or 'do not get and spread it' (benefit to both)?

Appealing to self-interest by stoking fear is the usual choice of communicators. While at times the fear can lead to behavioural changes, but when the threat is incomprehensible, and beyond control, emotional state of fear may induce defensive responses or generate an 'optimism bias', belief that bad things are less likely to befall oneself than others. Another crucial emotional reaction evoked by fear and threat is how they feel about others, in particular about out-groups (White, 2020). Research shows, undermining empathy, higher levels of ethnocentrism, intolerance, dehumanisation and punitive attitudes toward out-groups are often associated with perceived threat and distress. A narrative of 'othering', holding a particular group responsible for the misery one suffers, emerges and feeds the fear (Barreneche, 2020; Devakumar, Shannon, Bhopal, & Abubakar, 2020; Reese, 2001). The Chinese for their alleged unhealthy culinary habits, irresponsible lockdown defiers who do not stay at home but break the physical distancing by gathering at one place, the 'posh' for travelling abroad and being the root cause of importing the virus into India – the list of alleged 'culprits' is endless (Chung & Li, 2020).

The received wisdom, informed by the classical economic theories of decision-making, says people care only for their welfare, suggesting that we frame the messages in 'self-interest appeals'. Surprisingly, research in psychology and behavioural economics provides clear evidence that people are in fact, moral actors who care about the welfare of others and are motivated to cooperate. Studies show that when aware that their decision and behaviour could have negative consequence for others, people are more prone to adopt prosocial approach (Kappes et al., 2018). This does not mean one can expect saintly behaviour at all times, but if the sacrifice demanded is not at their risk, people are often willing to forfeit some comforts for the common good, for not wanting to appear as selfish in the eyes of others.

When efforts are made across individuals and communities and elicit cooperation, blurring the in-group out-group distinction, and forge a single community with a shared destiny, ethnic prejudices and religious intolerance can be reduced. An inclusive approach is required if the entire nation is to feel like one. For that to happen, one must openly acknowledge the differences and inequalities (Berger, Evans, Phelan, & Silverman, 2020). Although the germ can infect anyone, a princess or a pauper, yet we must understand the likelihood is far higher among those who lack access to resources or are more susceptible due to co-morbidity.

Let us look at the innocuous but straightforward message, 'wash your hands'. The very same message can be presented as zero-sum thinking, that someone else's loss is your gain, that you should not get the infection, even if others did. The zero-sum thinking encourages self-interest, leads to hoarding of protective materials, sanitisers and masks beyond what is necessary, without realising that such action is self-defeating. Alternatively, if it is presented as a non-zero-sum game, someone else's infection is a threat to oneself and everyone, it advances a prosocial approach. The 'break the chain' campaign in Kerala emphasised the non-zero-sum nature of the pandemic infection. Your act of washing hands and donning a mask is part of a more massive community effort. You are secure because of others, and your action helps protect others. Thus it is imperative that everyone washes their hands and not just you, for your benefit. It is in this background that we can understand the community efforts to break the chain campaign. For example, the community installed hand-washing stations at a wayside bus station (Anonymous, 2020).

Contrary to Descartes' famous dictum 'cogito, ergo sum' – 'I think therefore I am' – ideas do not merely come out of nowhere, independent of place and time, by the sheer power of one's brain. Although particular ideas and knowledge arise as the result of changing social conditions, institutions and practices, they are mediated by the communicative social institutions such as educational institutions and media. Society is not monolithic. Thus various social forces vie to frame the social reality to generate a particular 'social consciousness'.

Scholars are unanimous that there is no way the world is 'going back to normal'. 'New normal' is the buzz word of the post corona world. If the new normal has to learn from the past and forge an emancipatory and just social order, public health & risk communication during the pandemic must consciously choose frames that would promote harmony over the ones that would engender 'othering', frames that would promote prosocial mindset rather than just the self-interest. Media critique can play a part by revealing the hidden ramifications of the framing of the news about the pandemic, and help create a more humane 'new normal'.

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