

Summary: An analysis of influenza reporting in India

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- The type and use of news frames by two newspapers in India was studied: the *Hindu* and the *Times of India*.
- The objectives were:
 - To identify the news 'Frames' in the coverage of the H1N1 influenza in English newspaper articles.
 - To examine whether the coverage was predominantly targeted to 'create awareness' or to rise in the 'fear factor' among the public.
 - To explore the understanding of the H1N1 coverage among the news consumer.
- The five news frames were:
 - Preventive Measures Frame
 - Fear Rising Frame
 - Government Propaganda Frame
 - Public welfare oriented Frame
 - Holistic Health Care Frame
- Front-page coverage was harmful by over-emphasising the risks in comparison with other diseases prevalent in India hence creating a false impression about the risk of catching influenza.
- The preventive measure frame was thus not used very much. The anti-influenza drug Tami-flu began to be administered in government hospitals after advice promoting vaccination and a brief report on precautionary measures were given out; this caused people to panic and start to pay for Tami-flu at private hospitals.
- The fear-rising frame was used after the epidemic had peaked.
- The holistic health care frame was also hardly used, with the prevalent view of favouring Western specialist medicine over homeopathic medicine persisting.
- Focus groups disclosed that many people had failed to understand the mode of transmission of influenza, had stopped travelling to areas reported as 'epicentres', and did not understand the technical words used in the newspaper reports. Many families separated young and old people based on wrong media advice.
- Newspapers in India are growing in popularity.
- The media in India are selective in their choice of health story and often consider health as 'just another story'.