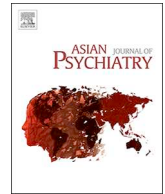




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Keeping the country positive during the COVID 19 pandemic: Evidence from India



Currently, one of the biggest challenges facing humankind is the Corona Virus Disease or COVID 19 that originated in 2019 in China (Wang et al., 2020a, Wang et al., 2020c). The World Health Organisation has declared COVID 19 as a Pandemic (World Health Organisation, 2020). With almost all the countries affected by this virus, most of the countries have already announced a complete lockdown to curb the spread of this virus further and are strictly suggesting social distancing. The lockdown related to COVID 19 is taking its toll on people both mentally and physically. There are a few academic studies that have tried to explore this angle (Duan and Zhu, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020a, Wang et al., 2020b; Yang et al., 2020). During such times, where emotional balance can go for a toss, parent and peer relationships can matter a lot (McMahon et al., 2020). Further, there is a high chance of people developing psychological stress and disorders like depression, insomnia, anxiety, anger, boredom, etc. (Brooks et al., 2020).

Amidst the lockdown, the biggest challenge for India, with a population of over 1.3 Billion, is to maintain social distancing when the lockdown is relaxed for a few hours every day for buying groceries and everyday essentials. The population is so vast that people throng to the nearby grocery shops making it difficult to maintain social distancing. Hence, the government and other associated government aides are working towards home delivery of essentials. These kinds of measures are making people confined to their premises more and more and makes chances of their coming out even for a while, meager.

During such tough times, when people are given any task with a valid logic that is not part of their usual routine, people can feel excited, and this can have a positive impact on their psychological well-being. In India, The Government of India had requested the people of India to observe a one day "Janata Curfew" (which was a mini lockdown of 14 h) on March 22nd, 2020 (The Economic Times, 2020). People were requested to appreciate the efforts of those working round the clock (health professionals, police department, media people, etc.), by clapping or by banging any utensils at home with a spoon at ones' doorstep or in the balcony to express solidarity at 5 pm sharp on that day for 5 min. This activity was a huge success, and the majority of the Indians expressed their solidarity wholeheartedly. People believed that they felt positive while taking part in the task and felt good overall (Barkur et al., 2020).

Two days after the one day "Janata Curfew," the government declared a complete lockdown in India for the next 21 days, from March 25th to April 14th, 2020 (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). Implementing complete lockdown was an arduous task keeping in mind the collectivistic nature of Indians and low individualism compared to other western countries. Seeing the need to keep the Indians feel positive, the Prime Minister proposed one more task for April 5th, 2020 (Sunday), nearly on the 10th day of the lockdown. The task was to switch off lights at home at 9 pm for 9 min and light a lamp or candle or torch or mobile phone flashlight in their respective doorstep or

balconies to fight darkness and make a statement that no one is alone in this fight against the COVID 19 pandemic. All over India, the majority of the people switched off their lights and followed the task instructions expressing solidarity with the government and each other. Many people took to social media platforms to appreciate the activity and mentioned the emotions that they went through before-during-and after the task.

This paper is an attempt to study the sentiments of Indians during the above task. We used the social media platform Twitter for our analysis. Using the following four hashtags, we extracted 24,998 tweets related to the task from April 5th, 2020 to April 6th, 2020: #9pm9minute; #AaoPhirSeDiyaJalayan; #LightofHope; and # April 5th. We analyzed the tweets using the software R and generated a word cloud and a graphical representation of the emotions in the tweets.

Fig. 1 depicts the word cloud generated and indicates the prominent terms that stood out, like fight, hope, anger, and trust. In the given context, the frequently tweeted words suggest that the people of India expressed their solidarity with the government in fighting the pandemic. Even though people were angry with the current unavoidable situation, they had trust and hope that collectively they could emerge out of this situation victorious.

Fig. 2 indicates that the maximum number of tweets had a positive feeling embedded in them. It means that people felt positive when so many fellow citizens expressed solidarity with each other and performed the lighting task, which not only lit everyone's morale and boosted it but also was a welcome change from the monotonous, no thrill routine during the lockdown. Another emotion that stood out in the tweets was trust, indicating that people had immense faith that they would come out of the current situation stronger, sooner or later. There were other emotions also expressed like surprise, anger, fear, joy, anticipation, disgust, and sadness too. Overall it can be seen that the task requested above was a welcome change from the routine lockdown chores and filled peoples' hearts with hope and trust and instilled positive feelings overall.

Standing in support of each other, showing emotional support to one another, and making everyone feel that we are together in this can be the best strategy to overcome the turbulent sensitive roller coaster ride individuals may face during the unprecedented lockdown. Keeping oneself engaged positively and contributing to one another's mental well-being becomes crucial too. Overall, it looks like a good move by the Indian government to announce such tasks that can be done together by the entire population, which nurtures the feeling of belongingness, motivates people, and subconsciously sends a message that "hang on there, you are not alone in this."

This study is limited to the social media platform Twitter. Future researchers can look into other social media platforms too and draw a bigger picture. With the world going through a turbulent situation because of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is crucial to see that the lockdown and other restrictions do not impact the psychological well-being of the population.



Fig. 1. Word cloud of the extracted tweets.

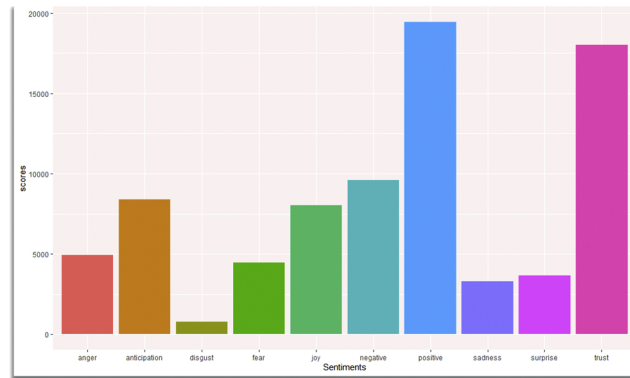


Fig. 2. Graphical representation of the sentiments.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

All the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest among the authors.

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