

News Agencies must paint a complete picture of Coronavirus

To allay fears and prevent unnecessary panic, the media must present the true picture of the state of affairs and not resort to sensationalism, advocates ***Ifeanyi Nsofor**.



Commercial driver helping passengers with sanitiser

Recently, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said, “We have an epidemic caused by Coronavirus, but we have a pandemic caused by fear “. This fear is worsened by how news agencies report the outbreak. These are some examples.

“Bodies ‘pile up’ in morgue as Iran feels strain of coronavirus” – CNN.

“First UK death from coronavirus confirmed as cases surge to 115” – The Guardian UK .

“Coronavirus: Global death toll exceeds 3,000” – Premium Times Nigeria

“Death toll from coronavirus in Italy rises to 148: Live updates” – Aljazeera

“Coronavirus update, map as death toll reaches 3,200. Infections soar in Italy, Iran and South Korea” – Newsweek

News outlets are often quick to report the number of infected and deaths due to Coronavirus. However, they do not highlight as prominently the number of Coronavirus survivors. Yet, there are many survivors.

There are currently 110,624 reported cases; 62,397 have recovered, 44,396 are currently infected, with 3,831 deaths.

Herefore, there are 16 times as many people who have survived Coronavirus as those who have died from it. A breakdown of Coronavirus survivors in some countries are as follows, China: 58,721, Iran: 2,134, Italy: 622 and South Korea: 166. The much-reported Diamond Princess Ship has 245 survivors, and this is hardly reported.

The Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Adichie describes this act of only focusing on one side of a story as the danger of the single story. In her TEDGlobal Talk, Chimamanda affirms that we are vulne-



Deserted plaza in Italy

rable and impressionable in the face of a story. She went further to say that, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

These Coronavirus headlines by major news agencies spell death, gloom and despair. Unconsciously, people are only associating deaths with the Coronavirus outbreak. They are taking extreme measures, closing businesses and schools. Currently, nearly 300 million children are out of school because of fear.

On the extreme end, the National Association of Funeral Directors in the United Kingdom have indicated that if Coronavirus is declared a Pandemic, they would consider streaming funeral services online. According to the Association, this is to prevent the spread of the infection and give the bereaved a chance to mourn their loss. However, this could be counterproductive because internet trolls may use such videos to propagate fear and panic.

This must change. Indeed, reporting the complete picture of the outbreak gives hope and builds confidence in people that being infected is not a death sentence. In contrast, continuing the negative reporting of COVID-19 increases hysteria, fear and panic associated with the outbreak. It perpetuates the narrative that people do not survive the infection. Fortunately, the data show the contrary.

Henceforth, these are four ways to ensure balanced reporting by news organisation:

First, news agencies must begin to write the complete story and always mention numbers of survivors in their headlines. Their articles on the Coronavirus outbreak should be aspirational as well as factual. Leaving out the thousands of people who survive the infection is a great disservice to survivors and paints an incomplete picture.

Second, we need to hear Coronavirus survivors speak about their experiences. Journalists should interview these survivors and document their journeys. There is a great lesson in this regard from the CNN Global Town Hall on Coronavirus. During the townhall meeting, Carl Goldman, a survivor at the Nebraska University Teaching Hospital was interviewed. He got infected while aboard the Diamond Princess Cruise Ship. Watching him share the symptoms he experienced, how he was treated by health workers and his recovery was liberating. More of such interviews should be done with survivors to encourage us all.

Third, news agencies must keep reiterating preventative measures in their reporting. People should know that doing these would reduce their risks of getting infected. Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; wash their hands with soap under running

“Third, news agencies must keep reiterating preventative measures in their reporting. People should know that doing these would reduce their risks of getting infected. Avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; wash their hands with soap under running water; cough/sneeze into a tissue paper or the curve of the elbows, maintain a distance of at least 5 feet from anyone coughing or sneezing, and contact their healthcare providers when in doubt.”

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Fourth, news agencies should be cautious about the types of information they share with the public. The World Health Organisation acknowledges that there is currently an infodemic – an overwhelming amount of true and false information on social media and websites. When the public is overloaded with only news of death, it could lead to internet trolls using such to create misinformation.

To keep fear from spreading faster than the actual virus, organizations must self-regulate and report the Coronavirus outbreak in a complete manner. It is the ethical thing to do. It is for public good and public health.

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