



Research Article

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# Impact of Health Journalism on Public Health

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## ABSTRACT

The media plays a crucial role in disseminating information about well-being. This paper aims to research the attributes of health reporters in relation to how they play an essential role in public health and the importance of precise health news reports since the public needs polished skills in well-being news coverage. The media greatly facilitates the public's access to health news. The veracity of the health information that is accessible, however, varies greatly. The media greatly impacts parents' decisions about their children's health, including whether they believe in vaccinations or which medications they should take. It may also affect how the general public views healthcare. This research paper examines the benefits and drawbacks of health journalism. It also describes some of the difficulties journalists encounter while reporting on health news and certain shortcomings in health journalism. This paper ends by outlining crucial elements that must be adopted for health information to be reported and disseminated successfully.

## INTRODUCTION

### Objective

This article aims to explore and highlight the impact of health journalism on public health. It aims to showcase health journalism's significant role in spreading awareness, influencing health behaviors, driving policy changes, and addressing health disparities.

### Review of Literature

Leask, & King, C. (2010) They conducted a qualitative study to examine media coverage of health issues and improve collaboration with journalists. Interviews with 22 health professionals revealed concerns about accuracy and sensationalism in health reporting. The study emphasized the importance of evidence-based reporting and called for trust-building between health professionals and journalists. It suggested training programs and workshops to enhance communication. Health professionals were encouraged to engage with the media, providing clear

messages and establishing relationships. The study aimed to promote accurate reporting, effective collaboration, and reliable health information dissemination for better public health outcomes.

McCombs, M. (2004). Examines the influential role of mass media in shaping public opinion through agenda-setting. His work emphasizes how media coverage determines the salience and significance of issues in the public's mind. By prioritizing certain topics and framing them in specific ways, the media indirectly influences what the public considers important. McCombs discusses factors such as media ownership, journalistic norms, and audience preferences that impact agenda-setting. Understanding this relationship between mass media and public opinion is crucial for individuals to critically engage with news and actively participate in shaping societal discourse.

Yamani, N., Keshvari, M., Adibi, P., & Shahnazi, H. (2018). The researchers explored the quality of health reporting in the Iranian context through content analysis of health news articles. The study identified several challenges,

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including the presence of unqualified journalists, the influence of commercial interests, and the lack of accuracy and balance in health reporting. The researchers emphasized the importance of enhancing the competence and professionalism of health journalists, as well as implementing stricter regulations to ensure responsible and accurate health reporting. The study aimed to improve the quality of health journalism and promote evidence-based health information dissemination.

Gollust, S. E., Lantz, P. M., & Ubel, P. A. (2009) The study revealed how news coverage of social determinants of health can polarize public opinion and contribute to divisions among different groups. The researchers found that media framing of these determinants, such as income inequality or racial disparities in health, can evoke strong emotional responses and reinforce existing beliefs. This polarization can hinder efforts to address health inequalities and create barriers to implementing effective policies. The study highlights the need for responsible and balanced reporting that fosters understanding and promotes collective action to address social determinants of health.

Thompson, T. (2014). Although there have been countless textbooks, monographs, and academic handbooks on this subject, this is the first encyclopedic work that covers theory and research on health communication and their application in practice. The three-volume set includes more than 600 original articles organized from A-Z to provide thorough coverage of this fascinating field, including theories and research traditions, evaluation and assessment, cultural complexity, high-risk and special populations, message design and campaigns, provider/patient interaction, and media coverage.

Tandon, P. (2020). The impact of these diseases is not limited to causing great morbidity and death among citizens; it has equally significant socioeconomic implications for both afflicted nations and other nations as well. The number of organizations responsible for reducing the larger negative implications of pandemics must be boosted, healthcare delivery systems should be improved, a permanent “watchdog” body should be created, and communication and coordination mechanisms need to be improved. International response and partnerships with development agencies will not only be required but will also put forth national initiatives.

Major, L. H., & S. M. (2020) In this book, who the public holds accountable for health problems determines who the public holds accountable for resolving those health problems. Health strategies aimed at the general public are the most effective means of improving health. This book’s research technique will boost public support for essential health initiatives. The authors conducted a systematic review of 25 years of research on theme framing and episodic framing in health news to identify strategies for refocusing responsibility in health news in order to gain public support for health policy. They apply their strategy to two of the world’s most pressing health crises, obesity

and mental health, and close by outlining future research and ideas for collaboration with other health experts, practitioners, and journalists.

Parvanta, C. F. (2011) Public health campaigns that are well communicated can provide individuals with information, empower them to make healthier decisions, and encourage public participation and policy changes. As part of the book, a chapter on informatics is devoted to introducing the health communication and informatics capabilities recommended by the Association of Public Health Schools. Research how leading public health agencies and organizations actively use health communication.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The proposed research is based on “Uses and Gratification Theory.”

According to the Uses and Gratification Theory, there are numerous ways that the media affects people. Media use is explained as people using them for their needs and feeling satisfied when they are met. According to the uses and gratifications theory, users are active agents who have control over their media consumption. Based on this theory, each person makes their own choices based on their moods and preferences. The media meets the needs of individuals. Some people watch the news for information, others for entertainment, some to ask good questions about their own health, and others to feel better. Some people watch based on their moods.

### **Research Questions**

- What practices can journalists follow to ensure the reliability and accuracy of health information?
- How is health journalism important for public health?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

It describes the respondent’s perceptions of the selected theme, making the research study descriptive. In addition, primary sources of data collection have been used. A questionnaire was used to collect data, and a sample size of 50 was used.

#### **Primary data source**

We use data collected from an online survey as a primary data source. For this study, 50 randomly chosen participants were surveyed, and their responses were recorded using structured questionnaires.

#### **Secondary data source**

A secondary data set is a set of information collected for a different purpose in the past. The study was conducted by reviewing various studies, articles, and websites.

### **METHOD OF SAMPLING**

50 questionnaires were distributed, and 100% of them turned out to be useful based on complete responses.



### **Sample size**

A total of 50 participants were surveyed for this study.

### **Tool for data collection**

An individualized, structured questionnaire consisting of ten questions.

## **INTRODUCTION**

“In today’s information-driven world, health journalism has evolved into a potent weapon for tackling issues relating to the general public’s health. Journalists covering health topics have the opportunity to make a positive difference in people’s lives by informing, educating, and engaging the general public. They translate difficult scientific material into intelligible and relevant text to the general audience, acting as a bridge between medical professionals and the general population.”<sup>1</sup>

### **The Importance of Health Journalism**

“Health journalism serves as a vital source of health-related information, empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their well-being. Health journalism informs, educates, and empowers. Health journalists increase health literacy and outcomes by delivering accurate and trustworthy health information. Health journalism educates about crucial health issues. This includes offering easy-to-understand health information and health education. Health journalists give accessible, accurate information to the public. This can involve reporting on new medical research, public health emergencies, or simplifying medical concepts. Health journalists educate the public and provide health information. This can involve promoting healthy lifestyles, disease prevention, and public health awareness. Health journalism can also change health habits. Health journalists can promote society’s health by changing attitudes towards specific diseases or treatments, advocating healthy lifestyles, or offering knowledge on preventing or managing certain conditions. Health journalism affects policy and law. Health journalists can influence healthcare by promoting policy changes or keeping organizations accountable. Health journalism improves health literacy and outcomes for everyone. It informs, educates, and empowers people about healthcare issues.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Spreading Awareness and Information**

“One of the primary functions of health journalism is to raise awareness and provide information about major health issues. This includes making health information easily accessible and understandable to the general public and educating the public on various health concerns.

### **Accessible Health Information**

Health journalists work hard to give accurate and dependable information to the general public. This can

involve reporting on the most recent medical research, keeping the public informed about public health problems, and explaining difficult medical ideas in layman’s terms.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Educating the Public**

Health journalists play an important role in teaching the public about various health concerns in addition to providing accessible health information. This can involve offering information on preventing or treating certain diseases, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, or raising awareness about critical public health issues.”

### **Influence on Health Behaviors**

“Health journalism can have a big impact on people’s health behaviors. Health journalists can contribute to enhancing society’s overall health by changing perceptions and attitudes towards specific diseases or treatments, advocating healthy lifestyle choices, or offering knowledge on how to prevent or manage certain conditions.

### **Changing Perceptions and Attitudes**

One way that health journalism can affect how people take care of their health is by changing how people think about and feel about certain diseases or treatments. For example, health journalists can help reduce fear or anxiety in the general public by giving accurate and reliable information about a relatively harmless disease or treatment.

### **Promoting Healthy Lifestyle Choices**

Health content that is engaging motivates readers to adopt healthier lifestyles. Articles on nutrition, exercise, mental health, and preventive healthcare motivate positive behavior modifications that can contribute to disease prevention and an improvement in overall health.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Challenges in Health Journalism**

“Despite its many benefits, health journalism is not without its challenges. These include combating misinformation and sensationalism, maintaining objectivity and veracity in reporting, and navigating the complex landscape of healthcare delivery.

### **Misinformation and Sensationalism**

Dealing with misinformation and hyperbole is a challenge that health journalists face. In an era where anyone can publish information online, it can be challenging for journalists to distinguish between fact and fiction. Furthermore, sensationalist reporting can induce dread or anxiety in the general public, resulting in a negative perception of relatively harmless diseases or procedures.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Maintaining Objectivity and Accuracy**

“Maintaining objectivity and accuracy in their reporting is another challenge that health journalists face. With so much information available online, it can be difficult for journalists to verify the accuracy of their sources. It is important for journalists to maintain their objectivity

when reporting on healthcare issues in order to provide accurate and reliable information to the public.”<sup>6</sup>

**The Future of Health Journalism**

Despite these challenges, the future of health journalism looks bright. With advances in technology making it easier than ever before for journalists to access information and share their stories with a global audience, there are many opportunities for growth in this field.

**Data Analysis**

Analyzing continuous and categorical data was done using descriptive statistics. The results were presented as percentages. The Chi-square test was used for categorical data to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. This study presents four major headings: demographics and socioeconomics, traditional knowledge, perceptions of health journalism, and attitudes toward health news. Health journalism’s impact on the public was the primary determinant of response. In this table, subjects who completed the questionnaires

were categorized by their age. In this table, the percentages show that questionnaires were not biased in their allocation to various groups. Using this method demonstrates the researcher’s impartiality in distributing questionnaires. This table shows the percentage of males and females who completed the questionnaires.

The figure below illustrates health journalism awareness. Only 18% of respondents said they were not familiar with health journalism, compared to 82% who were.

The respondents were then asked whether they needed health news in the media. Figure 4 shows that 92.2% of the people said yes and 7.8% said no.

After that, respondents were asked about which medium they preferred for health news. Figure 5 shows that 47.1% of people prefer social media, 31.4% prefer newspapers, 17.6% prefer television, and 3.9% prefer radio for health news.

In answering our next question, 80.4% of people think health journalism improves and influences people’s health knowledge, and 11.8% agree to some extent. Only 7.8% of people said no to this.

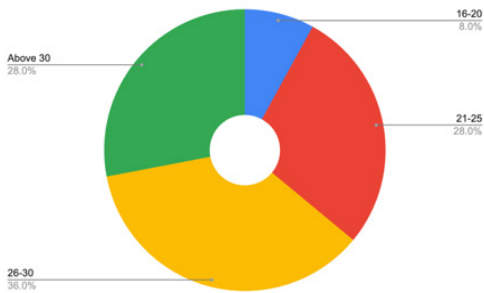


Figure 1: Age Group Breakdown

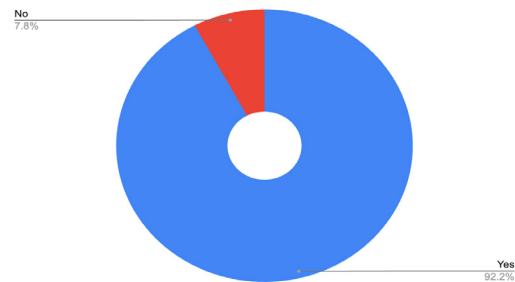


Figure 4: Do you need health news in the media ?

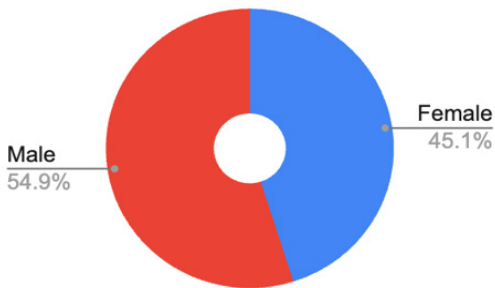


Figure 2: Gender Breakdown

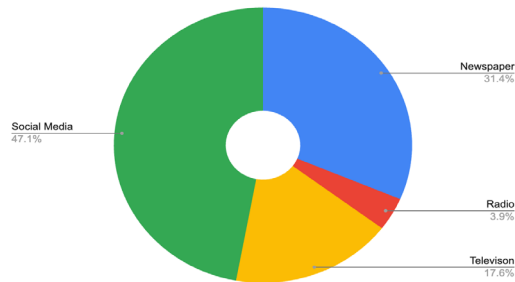


Figure 5: Which medium do you prefer for health news?

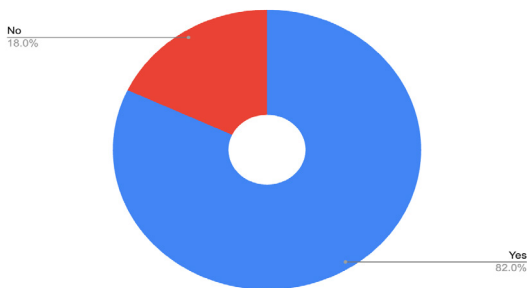


Figure 3: Are you aware of what Health Journalism is ?

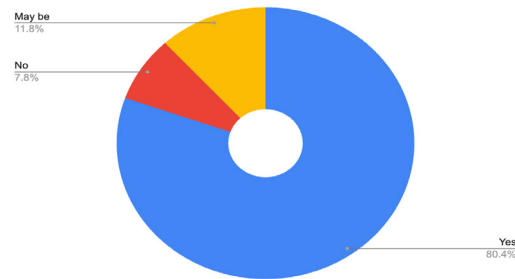
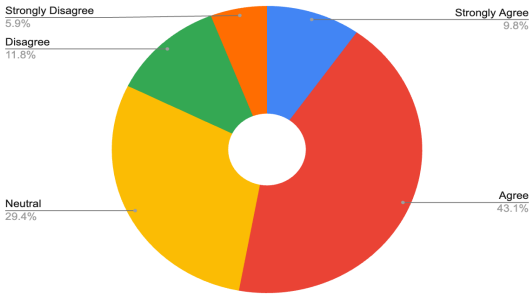


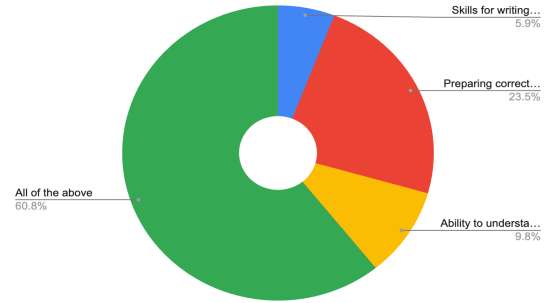
Figure 6: Does health journalism improve or influence people's knowledge about health?



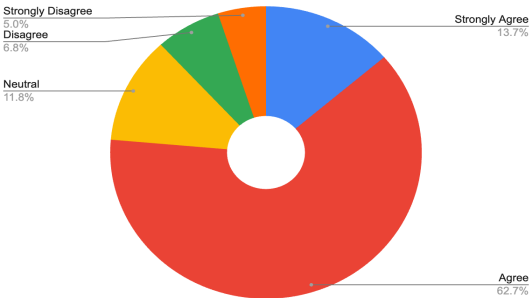
## Health Journalism Impact



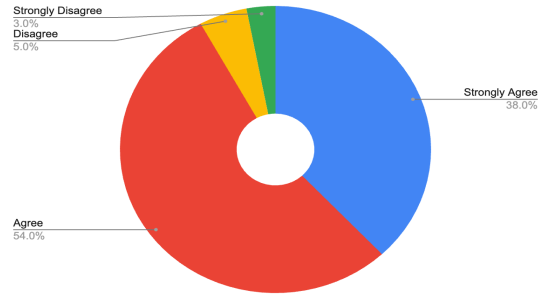
**Figure 7:** Has health journalism become a cost-effective way to promote public health?



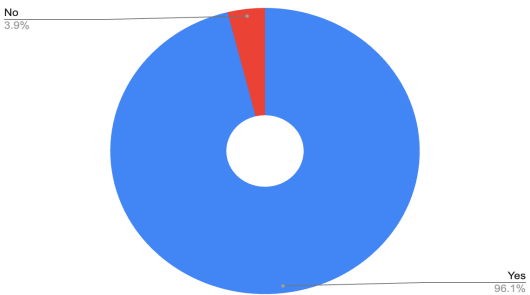
**Figure 10:** What are the necessary skills for a health journalist?



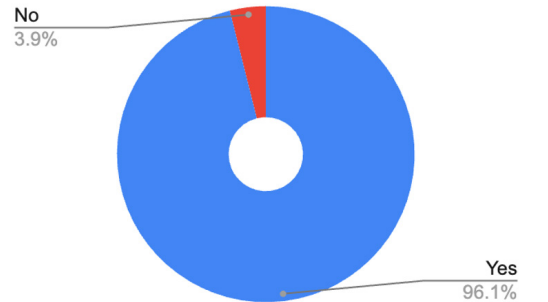
**Figure 8:** Will improvement in health journalism improve health literacy?



**Figure 11:** Can health journalists bring positive change to society?



**Figure 9:** Reporters should have special training in health reporting.



**Figure 12:** After COVID-19, do you feel Health Journalism has become an important part of public health?

43.1% of people agree, and 9.8% strongly agree, that health journalism is a cost-effective approach to public health, while 29.4% are neutral to some extent. The majority of people disagree with this, with 11.8% strongly disagreeing.

We went on to ask if health journalism improves health literacy, and 62.7% agreed, 13.7% strongly agreed, and 11.8% were neutral to some extent. Only 5.9% strongly disagree, and 5.9% of people disagree with this.

96.1% of the people who answered agreed that reporters should get extra training in health reporting. Only 3.9% of people said no to this.

After that, respondents were asked what skills are necessary for a health journalist, and 60.8% of people said that all of the above skills are required; 23.5% said preparing correct health reports is required; 9.8% said the ability to understand health issues and medical reports is required; and 5.9% said skills for writing medical terms are a must.

The results of our next question show that 54% agree, 38% strongly agree, and 11.8% are neutral to some extent about whether health journalism contributes to positive changes in society. Only 4% strongly disagree, and 4% of people disagree with this.

Following our next question, 96.1% of the people said that health journalism has become an essential part of public health after COVID-19. The number of people who said no was only 3.9%.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The research mentioned above used a sample size of 50 people. Many researchers have studied the effects of health journalism on public health because it is a subject of great interest. In our research paper, we conducted a systematic survey to assess the impact of health journalism on public health. Our findings indicate that health journalism significantly impacts public health, both positively and negatively. One of the best things about health journalism

is that it can make people more aware of important health issues and encourage them to change their behavior. 80 percent agree that health journalism makes people more aware of their health. Many of the articles and stories we looked at had information about how to prevent, treat, and manage health problems. This can help people make better decisions about their health. Health journalism can also help remove the stigma from some health problems and teach people to understand and care about others. Approximately 48% of respondents believe social media is helpful for finding health-related information.

However, our findings also suggest that health journalism can have negative impacts on public health. One of the main concerns is the potential for misinformation or inaccurate reporting. In some cases, health journalists may exaggerate or misinterpret research findings, which can lead to confusion and unnecessary anxiety among the public. Additionally, sensationalized or fear-inducing reporting can sometimes discourage people from seeking appropriate medical care or adhering to recommended treatments.

“Our findings are consistent with those of other studies on this topic. For example, McCombs (2004) found that the media can have a powerful effect on public opinion and can influence the public’s perception of health issues.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Gollust, Lantz, and Ubel (2009) found that news coverage of social determinants of health can polarize public opinion and create divisions among different groups.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite these concerns, our findings suggest that health journalism can be a valuable tool for improving public health. However, it is important for health journalists to adhere to high standards of accuracy and ethics and to be aware of the potential consequences of their reporting.

Health journalism has a significant impact on public health, and it is important for researchers, policymakers, and journalists to work together to ensure that the public receives accurate and reliable health information.

They also said that health journalists should have specialized training in health because their job is to talk to, inform, and teach people about how to live healthy lives.

### Limitations

The article may not fully cover health journalism. It covers the issue broadly; however, certain details may be missing. The article doesn’t mention social media’s role in health journalism or health journalists’ difficulties confirming sources.

Finally, the article gives a generic view of health journalism and may not reflect the particular experiences

and challenges of health journalists in other nations or locations.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, health journalism is an extremely important component in the process of informing, empowering, and educating the general population. Health journalism has a bright future ahead of it if it can overcome obstacles such as misinformation and sensationalism while maintaining its objectivity and accuracy in reporting, spread awareness and information about important healthcare issues, influence health behaviors, impact policy and legislation, address disparities in healthcare provision, and so on.

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