



Social Media: A Source of information dissemination and misinformation during Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

There has been significant role of social media in dissemination of information during Covid-19 pandemic. This study pursues the underlying reasons for using social media during Covid-19 pandemic. This study is based on data collection from 410 participants within the age group 20 to 60. The responses were analysed using descriptive statistics with figures and graphs. The results indicated that the participants in the age group below 50 used social media more frequently and it was observed that the social media was used a prime source of information during Covid-19 pandemic. This study emphasis the need of using social media during crises times and simultaneous response to misinformation cases by governments.

Keywords: Social media, information dissemination, Covid-19, misinformation, rumours.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media have become one of the most widely used source of information worldwide from the last several years. An individual activity on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube began to increase manifold during Covid-19. A number of studies [Jordan et al., 2018, Shah et al., 2019, Sinnenberg et. al., 2019 & Steffens et. al., 2019] reveal that social media can play an important role as a source of data for detecting epidemics with focus on public attitudes and behaviours also to support crises communication. There is also lack of scrutiny and censorship which gives social media platforms to publish or disseminate information freely leading to fake news.

It is also observed that social media have been contributory in lessening the pandemic's initial effects by presenting information and enabling communication with friends and family [Francis, 2020]. People have been using social media to share experiences with the disease and have become a source of entertainment for specific age group. This study essences on the importance of social media in disseminating information during covid-19 pandemic.

The aim of the current study is to assess the impact of social media on dissemination of information and misinformation on the social media users during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current pandemic of Covid-19 led to exponential use of social media but it is also accompanied by misinformation, misconceptions and rumours and led to psychological impacts on its users also. The main objective of this study is to seek reasons for using social media for dissemination of information and outline the rumours and misconceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on online survey on voluntary participation using a questionnaire based on sampled questions about Covid-19 pandemic and their responses to the disease using social media. The study includes 410 responses within the age group 20 to 60 from six districts of UT of J&K-(India). The online survey was designed to obtain social media use before and after the arrival of Covid-19 pandemic by incorporating queries about frequency before and after COVID-19 pandemic. The reasons for using social media during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic

have been investigated. The methodology of study is quantitative in nature and seeks numerical data on behaviours in a wide spread manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

These section analysis the individual responses of social media contribution in dissemination of COVID-19 apprehension. Data is collected and analysed on social media influence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The samples include 58.5% of male respondents and 41.5% of female respondents composed of diverse ages and cultural backgrounds (Figure 1).

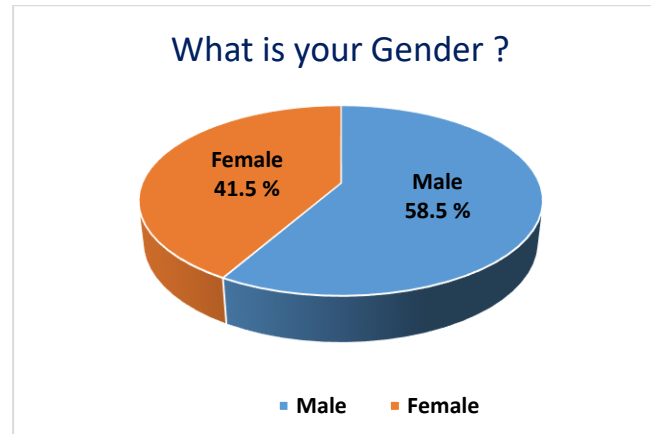


Figure 1: Gender Classification

The number of respondents include 25.6 % from district Srinagar, followed by 17.6 % from Anantnag district, followed by the Baramulla district at 16.1%, followed by 14.1 % from Rajouri district. Those from Budgam district were 13.4% and Jammu district respondents were 13.2 % (Figure 2).

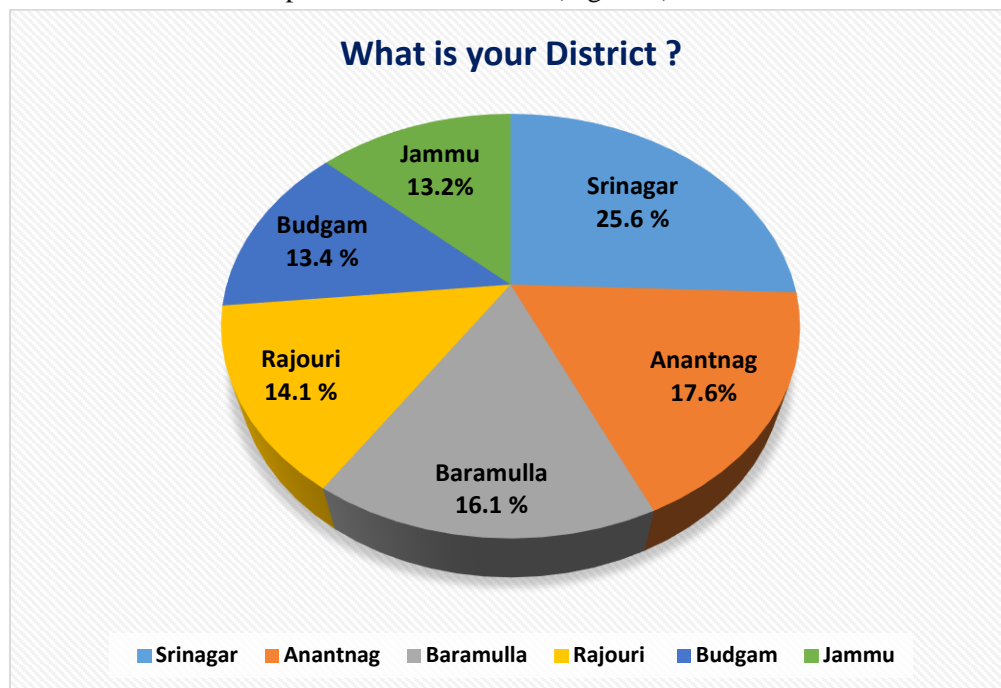


Figure 2: District wise respondents

The study includes 31 % respondents between the age group 20-30, 25 % were made up individuals in the age group 31-40, 28% of respondents were between in the age group of 41-50 and 16 % being between 51 and 60 (Figure 3).

According to these results, it was clear that those having age below 50 years rely mostly on social media to get relevant news on the Covid-19 pandemic. Those having age from 20-30 years are the ones who responded more which indicates that the sample is made up of mostly young and middle aged adults.

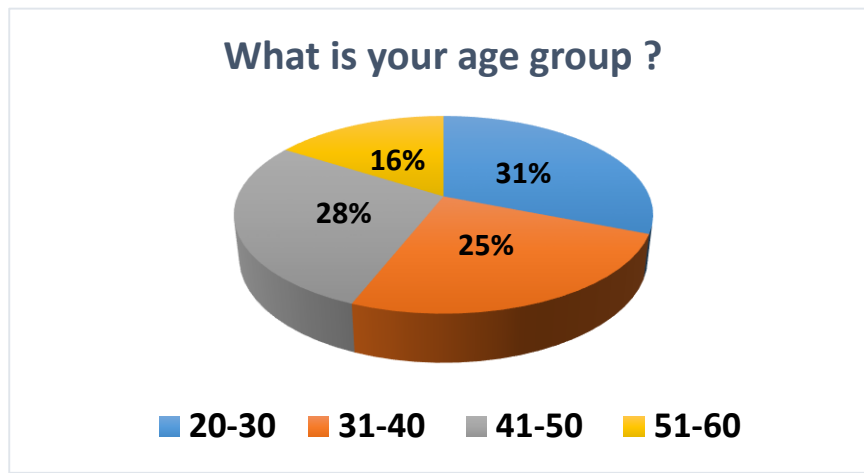


Figure 3: Social media reliance by age

Almost 51.2% of the respondents were students, and 18% were government employees followed by 16.1% from private sector individuals and 14.7% as respondents neither having any work nor a student (Figure 4).

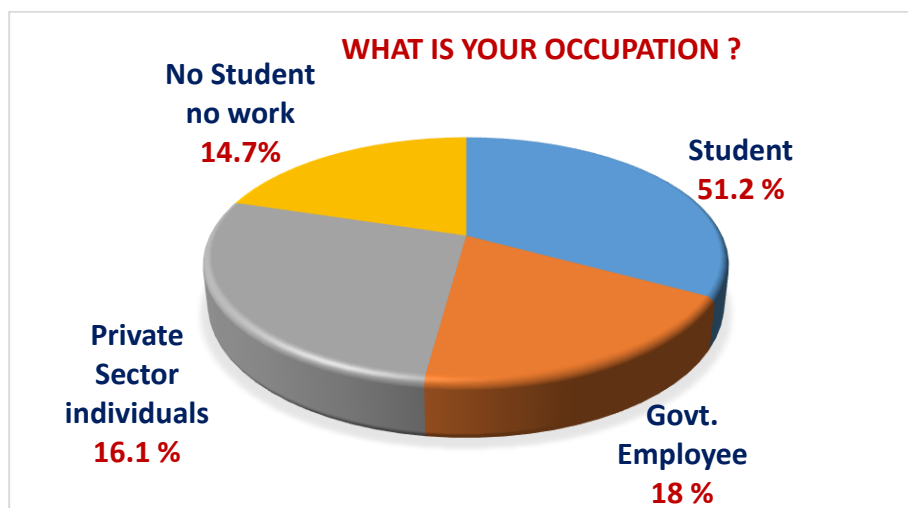


Figure 4: Occupation of respondents

Before the onset of Covid-19, from the 410 persons responded the questionnaire with 32% recorded as having used social media constantly for 2 to 4 hours daily, while 26% responded having used social media for 1 to 2 hours daily. The 22% of individuals recorded having used social media for 4 to 6 hours daily (Figure 5). A smaller group of 12% used it for less than an hour and 8% of respondents recorded having used social media for more than 8 hours.

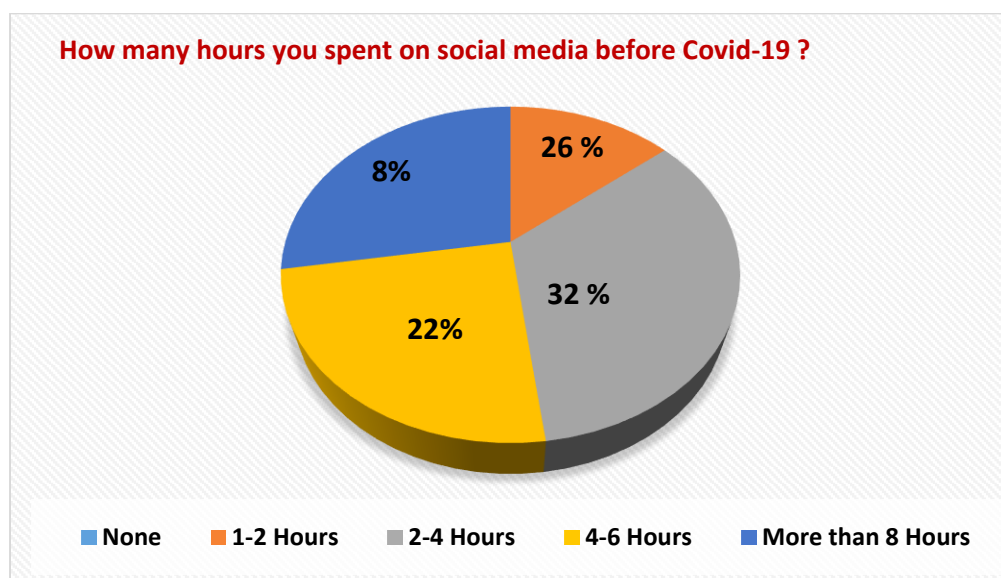


Figure 5: Social media use by number of hours before Covid-19 pandemic

The observations were also recorded for respondents using social media after the onset of Covid -19 pandemic. The largest number of respondents with 26% recorded having used social media for more than eight hours daily. The 23% respondents reported having used social media for 4 to 6 hours. The respondents with sample size of 13.2 % reported to have used social media for 1 to 2 hours daily.

The study reveals that after the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, people committed most of their time in terms of number of hours to social media use to get the news updates of this disease [Wong, et al. 2020]. It was also recorded that before COVID-19, only 9% used social media for more than 8 hours and this figure increased to 26% after the onset of Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 6) which indicates increase in social media users after the onset of Covid -19 pandemic.

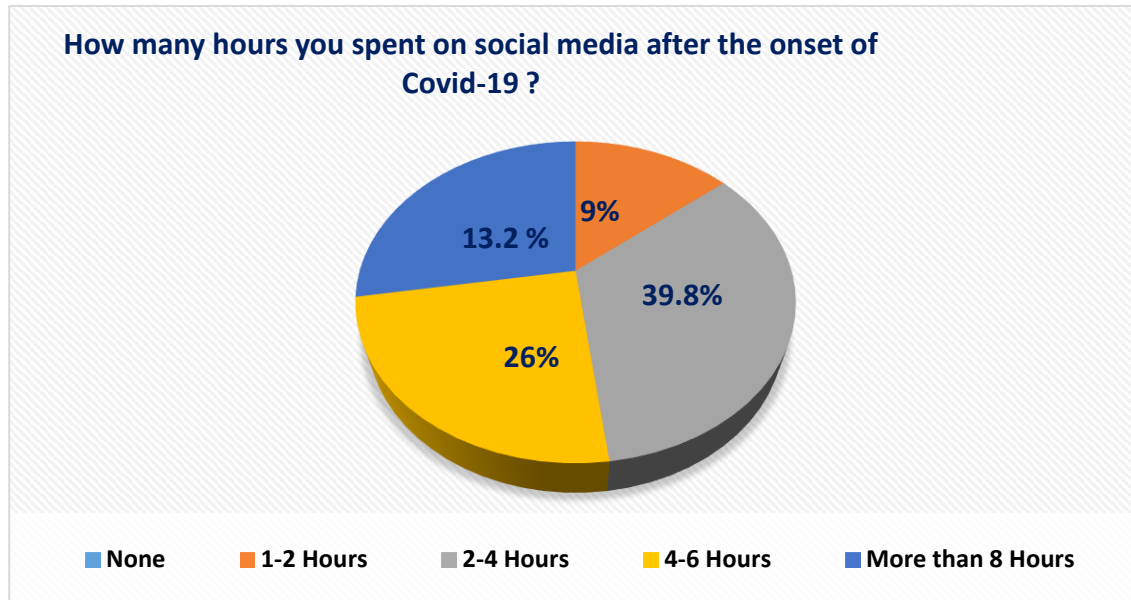


Figure 6: Social media use by number of hours after Covid-19 pandemic

The most commonly used social media platforms among respondents (Figure 7) were WhatsApp (31 %), Facebook (26 %), Twitter (19 %), Instagram (14%) and YouTube (10%).

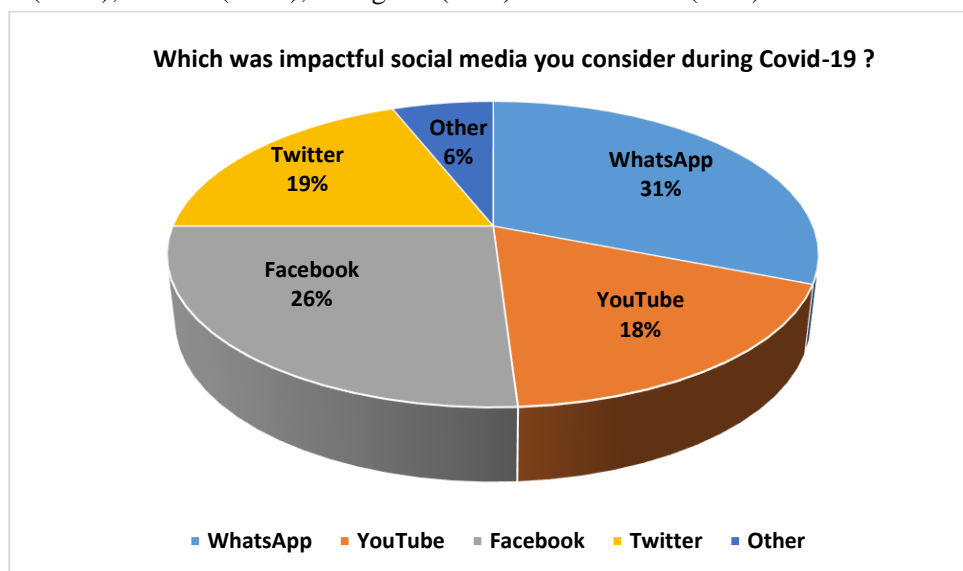


Figure 7: Social media platforms used by respondents

The study reveals that 44% social media users prefer to use it for their private use, 33 % when alone, 11 % with friends and 7 % together with friends and a small group of 5 % used social media with their parents (Figure 8).

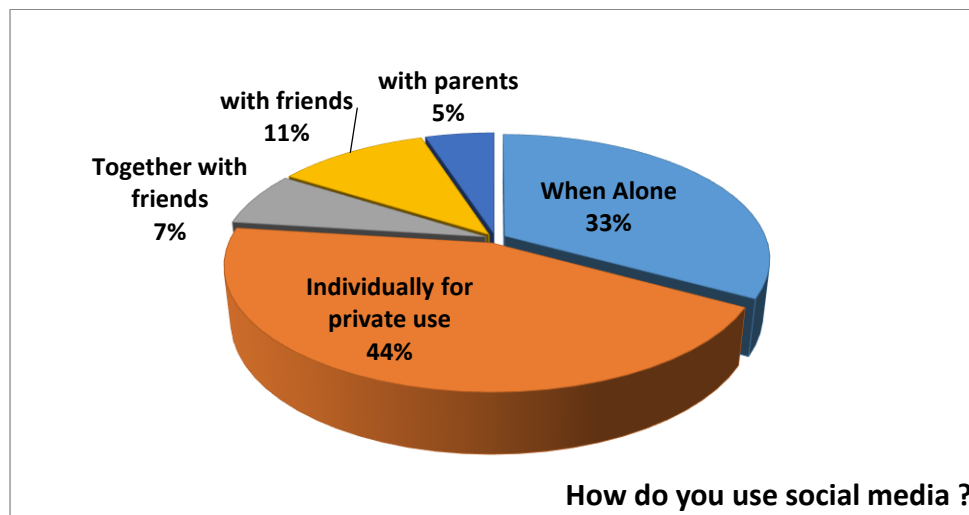


Figure 8: Social media behaviour

The study indicates that news and reports with 41% were the most preferred item to consume on social media, videos and movies with 33 % were as the second most preferred item followed by studies and research at 14 % (Figure 9).

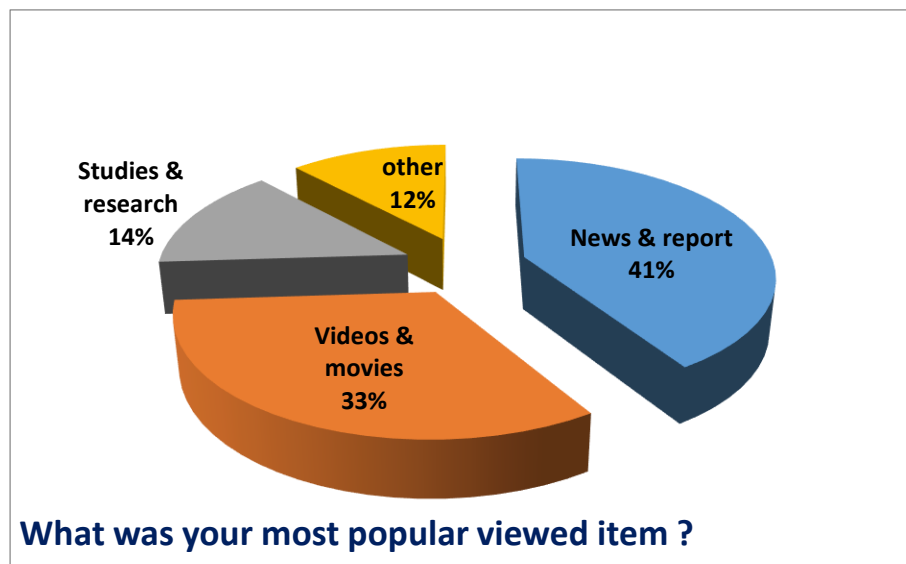


Figure 9: Most popular items viewed

The study also analysed the reasons for using social media by the respondents (Figure 10). The 82 individuals agreed that social media were the only source of information from which they got to know about the Covid-19, 90 individuals agreed that social media provided them with accurate information regarding Covid-19, 74 individuals responded with use social media made them feel psychologically more comfortable, 107 individuals agreed that they were curious to know more about the Covid-19 and being their reason for using it and 33 individuals decided to use it because they had more time to use it while 24 individuals responded with the reason that they wanted to escape from reality.

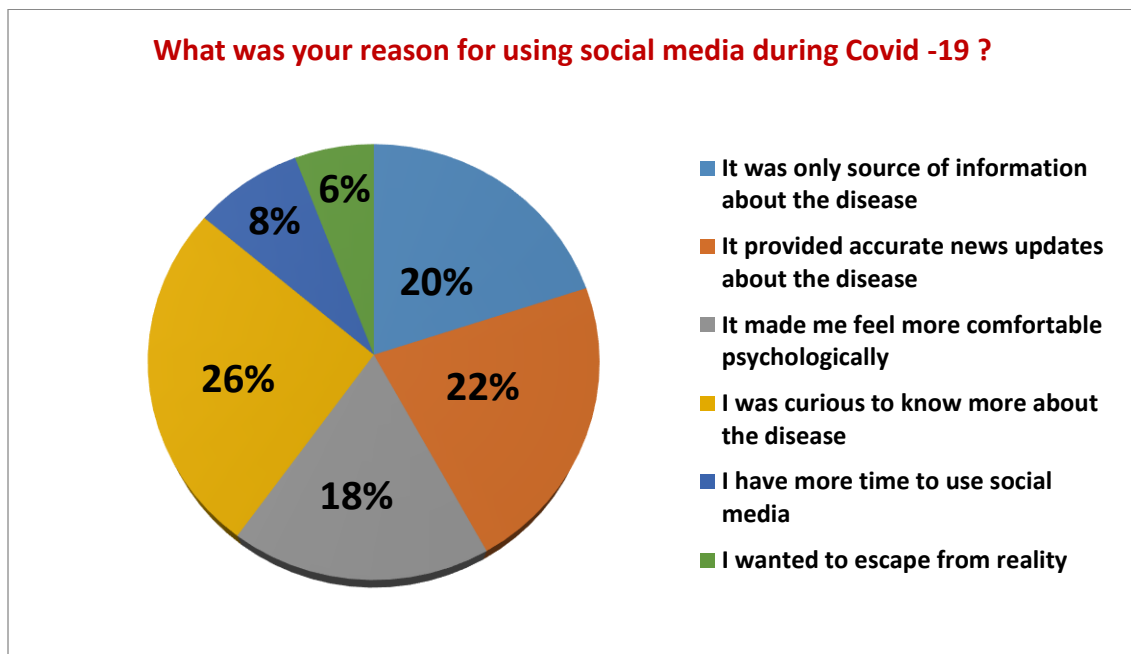


Figure 10: Reasons for using social media

The study also analysed effect of Covid-19 rumours (Figure 11). There were psychological effects of rumours of Covid-19 that raised fear and panic as agreed by majority of 37.1 % respondents, 11.5 % respondents agreed that rumours make them feel isolated from their families, 31.9 % respondents agreed that rumours make them more eager to pick and watch the news and 19.5 % respondents do not associate rumours with the negative feeling of living.

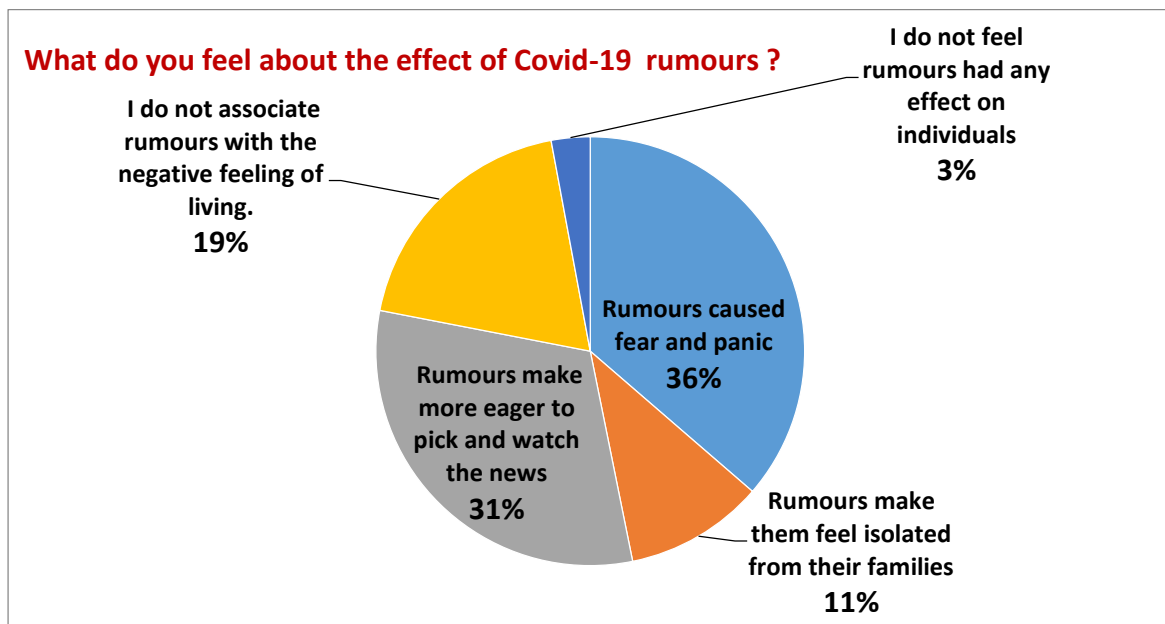


Figure 11: The effect of Covid-19 rumours on the respondents

4. CONCLUSION

The current study seeks to identify the underlying reasons for using social media as source of information dissemination during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study reveals that individuals used social media significantly during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic than before it. This study also suggested that individuals turned to social media as a source of information for this disease during this period. This study also recommends the government institutions to develop measures to correct misinformation and rumours in social media. Although this study also reveals that social media was used as an indispensable information dissemination tool during the COVID 19 pandemic, yet its unsecured nature exposes individuals to misinformation and rumours that led to psychological impacts on its users also.

5. REFERENCES:

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