A Sociological Study of Media Exposure and Societal Desensitization towards Violence and Death

Anshuman Jha
Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, India

Abstract
Since the beginning of the 21st Century, the media industry has undergone rapid change - and with it, so has society. Its symbiotic latching onto the Internet, a trailblazing staple of the modern age, has led to changes in not just the media's operations but also how society engages with news and information disseminated through the internet. While there are well-documented benefits in having access to a near-instantaneous relay of real time information from all over the globe, there are concerns that the internet has permanently altered the way we connect to each other, creating an invisible barrier and a wall of detachment that has not only led to social and cultural alienation and the rise of a general sense of helplessness, it has also turned into political apathy and a slew of ineffectual policy responses to otherwise large-scale catastrophes.

This paper is an interdisciplinary, albeit primarily sociological, investigation into how society's response to large-scale events has been impacted by social media's unending dissemination of images and videos of mass violence and death. The study will also include elements of media studies, cultural psychology, and other fields of study adjacent to sociology, subject to change owing to the theoretical demands of the paper. By gathering a list of recent global events that, in many cases, involve large-scale violence and mass casualties and studying the broad reactions from the public on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, as well as how the online reception of those events has influenced real-life public dialogue and discourse surrounding those issues. This can provide a critical window into the intersection of the online with the offline, the repercussions of this merger, and the road ahead.

Index Terms- Desensitisation, Apathy, Compassion Fatigue, Violence, Media, News, Sociology, Psychology

I. INTRODUCTION

In an age where an endless reservoir of knowledge is just a few clicks away, instantaneous access to breaking news and realtime information about local issues and global events has risen to unprecedented levels. Information is currency and one feels almost obligated to be "updated" and "informed" about the latest news in the world, yet there appears to be an equal and opposite reaction in the form of rising apathy and even hostility to certain topics.

News items fall out of the limelight as quickly as they enter - which is faster than they did a century before. The concept of virality has been discussed to the point of exhaustion so I will refrain from delving into it, the point being that while things are more likely to be shared amongst the general public at an accelerated pace due to the internet and social media, people are also likely to forget it as soon as another news item arrives carried on the perpetually-operating conveyor belt of instant-gratification. A lot of discourse has been generated, both in academic circles as well in public spaces, assigning blame to the diminishing attention spans of the youth and the upcoming generations.

Whatever the reasons might be, there seems to be an upper limit on how long a certain news item stays in the popular

consciousness before it slowly, or in some cases, immediately dips into obscurity. In this paper we shall discuss how some of the most sensitive hot-button topics in recent memory become "viral", only to slowly fade away into irrelevance - giving rise to an increasing number of people being disillusioned or disenchanted with the issues and in some cases becoming increasingly hostile, giving root to harmful perceptions and misinformation ripe with ignorance, bigotry and prejudice reinforced by the news industry's constant and reckless unloading of highly graphic and disturbing visual and text-based content on all channels, be it your television set or your mobile phone.

One argument that tends to be made in defence of the hyper-condensation and saturation of violent media is that it creates awareness amidst the masses about issues they wouldn't otherwise be privy to. This makes sense, the awareness can in turn prompt institutional pro-activeness in managing the crises and creating a support system built on social media vigilance that helps anyone who needs it. However, this is a utopian conceptualization of how social media works and most issues aren't given quite the importance or attention that they might warrant. It could be seen as an "algorithmic lottery", and even if a particular news item wins it, chances are they won't stay in the news for long. Continued exposure, on the other hand, risks desensitization and fatigue, being weaponised in the form of frustration and anger towards the incident in question.

In contrast to the slower-paced news cycles of the past, today's digital media environment delivers a relentless barrage of updates. A century ago, a news item would linger in public consciousness for days or even weeks, allowing for deeper reflection and sustained discussion. Today, the shelf life of news is drastically shortened, driven by the internet and social media. Psychologists have noted the rise of 'compassion fatigue' or 'empathy fatigue,' where individuals become desensitized to human suffering due to continuous exposure. Sociologists argue that this phenomenon is exacerbated by the relentless flow of information, which can overwhelm the human capacity for empathy and lead to numbness or indifference towards global events.

Social media algorithms play a significant role in determining what content becomes visible to users. These algorithms prioritize sensational and emotionally charged content, contributing to a cycle where only the most shocking news gains traction. This 'algorithmic lottery' ensures that even when important issues gain visibility, they are quickly replaced by the next viral sensation. The fleeting nature of media coverage has profound implications for public discourse and policy-making. Issues that briefly capture public attention often fail to sustain the

momentum needed to drive meaningful change. As a result, policy responses can be reactive rather than proactive, driven more by the ebb and flow of public interest than by sustained advocacy or evidence-based analysis.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the course of preparing this research paper, I perused multiple studies and articles on the topic – while my initial foray into the literature on desensitisation was dominated by academic discussions around the psychological aspect and the physiological manifestations of the phenomenon, I eventually found my way to more sociology-oriented analyses. Scholars such as Christopher Ojeda, as well as the seminal research paper entitled "Comfortably Numb: Desensitizing Effects of Violent Media on Helping Others" (Brad J. Bushman, Craig A. Anderson, 2009) were formative to my understanding of the issues at hand. Through a comprehensive appraisal of other material on the topic, I was able to put together a solid scaffolding to support my own research work.

The existing literature provided me with a convenient but comprehensive framework for understanding all the varied effects of long-term media exposure on societal desensitization and engagement. Moreover, it also familiarized me with the perils of social media platforms and the rise of the exploitative and deeply problematic attention economy that monetizes the masses' hunger for information and oftentimes genuine desire to help those in need. After reading about potential root causes of the widespread desensitisation, I was helped particularly by Itzhak Yanovitzky's illuminating paper on "Effects of News Coverage on Policy Attention and Actions" which showed the effects of a volatile news coverage on policy decisions and institutional response to tragedies and conflicts.

Overall, however, I found that there was a dearth of scholarship linking these factors and phenomena. For example, while there was considerable literature on the links between the media over-exposure and psychological and emotional distress, there was a relative lack of scholarship delving into its long-term societal implications. This further motivated me to pursue a detailed multifaceted account of the forces at play – one that attempts to decode the bigger picture instead of focusing on each factor individually. I strongly believe that the future of scholarship around this particular issue would entail further research into effective strategies for mitigating the adverse effects of media saturation and promoting sustained public awareness and action.

III.   METHODOLOGY

For my research paper, I utilized an interdisciplinary approach, which drew from sociology while also incorporating elements from media studies and psychology. The methodology involved initially curating a list of recent global events characterized by large-scale violence and mass casualties, such as the Ukraine-Russia war, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Assam and Bihar floods. My primary source for data collection was measuring public reaction through tools like Google Trends, that are useful in mapping interest spikes and declines in correlation with media coverage and social media activity.

Through regular appraisals of what's trending on social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter, I further refined my analysis of public interest towards the aforementioned events. To test my data-based findings, I conducted qualitative interviews with individuals across various ages, genders, classes, and professions to provide insights into personal experiences of continuous exposure to violent and tragic news. A comprehensive literature review helped me take stock of prior cross-discipline (media studies, psychology, medical, and sociology-oriented) academic discussions on desensitization, compassion fatigue, media influence, and public policy – this in turn helped me identify the blindspots of pre-existing body of literature and accordingly frame the scope of my study. The study also employs a comparative analysis of the selected events to identify patterns and unique factors influencing media coverage and public interest trajectories. Finally, the research evaluates the long-term impact of media coverage on public awareness, policy responses, and institutional preparedness, contrasting cases with sustained media attention that led to significant changes against those where interest quickly waned. Through these integrated methods, my research aims to show how continuous exposure to violent media gives rise to mass desensitisation and by extension, impairs policy responses.

IV.   CASE STUDIES

For the purpose of this research paper, I have gathered a list of seemingly unrelated events with varying causes and effects that are almost all connected by one thing – being aggressively covered by media and gaining virality on social media forums, only to disappear from the public eye just as quickly – leading to no meaningful discussions over the complications and implications of the events or the long-term ripple effects, leading to blindspots and half-measures in institutional responses to those events due to lack of interest or push from the public.

The events being analyzed range from major global events like the highly-publicized Ukraine-Russia War and the Israel-Palestine Conflict to high-stakes to domestic issues like the Assam and Bihar floods, while initially getting substantial media attention, were quickly swept away by other issues. While large-scale casualties were common in both disasters, they apparently weren't enough to sustain media coverage. Even on a local level, persistent civic issues like poor infrastructure and drainage are threats to national security, jeopardizing the health and safety of millions of citizens. Yet due to a lack of sustained momentum, they are frequently neglected.

This lack of longevity in the public domain again leads to lack of comprehensive understanding and a lack of concrete institutional safeguards and precautionary measures being put in place. This in turn exposes vulnerabilities in the system and makes those incidents prone to being repeated in the future.

In the following sections, I will attempt to map out the trajectory of these events in terms of the changes in their perception by the general public.

A. Three Phases of a Breaking News Story: Spike in Popularity, Inflection Point, Decline

The life cycle of the average viral news story can be broadly divided into three phases – initial buzz and rise into the mainstream, peak popularity and near-ubiquity in the public domain, eventual fizzling out and fading into obscurity. This tracks even in major large-scale catastrophes that go on for considerably longer than their news coverage would indicate. For instance, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the highly-documented and contentious Israel-Palestine war both involved mass casualties and widespread sustained widespread violence and hostility over long periods of time. In the case of the Ukraine-Russian conflict, estimates suggest over 40,000 military and civilian casualties on both sides, with civilian deaths exceeding 8,000. More than 8 million Ukrainians have fled the country, with millions more internally displaced.(UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, 2024) All in all it has resulted in massive destruction of infrastructure, housing, and public services, leading to a humanitarian crisis.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, on the other hand, is a complicated and multi-layered one dating all the way back to 1948 - however the recent escalation is considered as Israeli retaliation after being attacked by Hamas operatives on October 7 last year, leading to over 30,000 deaths, and thousands more injured, with extensive damage to infrastructure and housing. (Reuters, 2024) While thousands of Israelis had their lives disrupted, with the attack leading to damage of the social fabric of Israel, approximately 1.9 million people, or 85% of Gaza's population,

have been displaced. A large proportion of these people were women and children. (UN Women, 2024)

However, both conflicts outlasted their presence in the news. They initially received immense media coverage, with news outlets around the world providing continuous updates, graphic images, and in-depth analyses of the unfolding events. Social media platforms were flooded with posts, videos, and live streams from the ground, capturing the attention of millions globally.

In particular, the Israel-Palestine war sparked mass outrage on Twitter and Instagram, with hashtags – namely, #freepalestine, #savepalestine, #gaza, and #prayforpalestine – making the rounds online. For the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the most popular hashtag was #ukraine, while more topical ones like #standwithukraine, #ukrainerussiawar, #stoprussianaggression, and #prayforukraine were also in trend.

The global community was engaged, with widespread discussions and calls for action dominating public discourse. However, despite the prolonged nature of these conflicts, the intensity of media coverage and public attention has significantly waned over time.

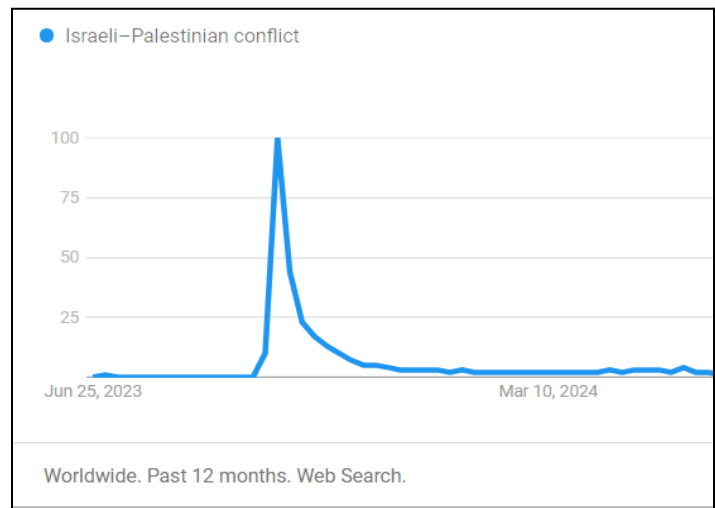Figure 2: A picture of Rafah, taken in late February 2024 (Source: @timesofgaza on Instagram)

Figure 3: Google Trends longitudinal graph indicating public interest for Israeli-Palestine Conflict (Source: Google Trends website)

Figure 1: A picture of southern Gaza Strip, taken in October 2023 (Source: Associated Press)

In fact, public reach and engagement with both issues immediately took a nosedive soon after the breaking of the news - Google search queries for updates on both topics for instance, went down dramatically after the events had spent a few days in the limelight. In figures 3 and , the Google trends graphs of both issues indicate there was a spike in interest, peaking at hundred (it is not an absolute figure, rather the percentage of the interest it had garnered in the form of Google searches) shortly after the Russian invasion began and the Hamas attack took place

respectively. Despite the Israel-Palestine war as well as Ukraine-Russia war being currently active (as evident by figures 1- 2, and 4- 5 respectively) the graphs dropped to one percent, signaling that the public's search interest in both issues has decreased dramatically, to just 1% of what it was at its peak.

Figure 4: Satellite images of a city in Ukraine before and after Russian invasion (Source: Maxar Technologies)

Figure 5: Google Trends longitudinal graph indicating public interest for Russo-Ukraine War (Source: Google Trends website)

Similar patterns of initial heavy media coverage followed by a rapid decline in public interest can be observed in the Assam floods, Bihar floods, and climate change. Assam has a major issue of recurrent floods. In the Assam floods of 2020, over 5.5 million people were affected, with more than 100 deaths and hundreds of thousands displaced. (Assam State Disaster Management Authority, 2020) As figure 6 shows, significant damage to homes, crops, and infrastructure was reported. According to Google Trends data in Figure 7, the search interest for "Assam floods" peaked at 100 for the first time during the 2020 disaster but soon dropped to less than 10 within a few months. This pattern can be observed each time the area has had floods since then, including a major peak and decline in 2022.

Figure 6: Extensive damage due to Assam floods in July 2020 (Source: IANS)
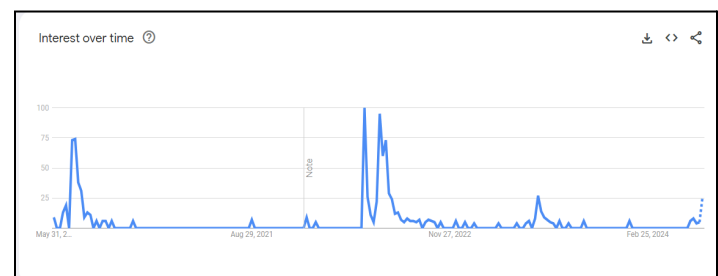

Figure 7: Google Trends longitudinal graph indicating public interest for Assam Floods (Source: Google Trends website)

Bihar, similar to Assam, has a recurrent flood problem. Being one of the country's most flood-prone areas, the people of Bihar face devastating flooding on a regular basis. The Bihar floods of 2020 impacted nearly 8 million people, leading to over 130 deaths and displacing millions. (Press Trust of India & Business Standard, 2020). The floods caused extensive damage to

agricultural lands and infrastructure, severely affecting the local economy and livelihoods. Identical to Assam flood's performance on Google Trends, figure 9 shows that "Bihar floods" saw a peak interest of 100 during the 2020 events, which sharply declined to below 10 shortly after. Bihar flood's Google Trends graph continually rises and declines multiple times over the last 5 years, much like it was the case in Assam floods.

Figure 8: Flooded streets and houses in Bihar in 2020 (Source: IANS)
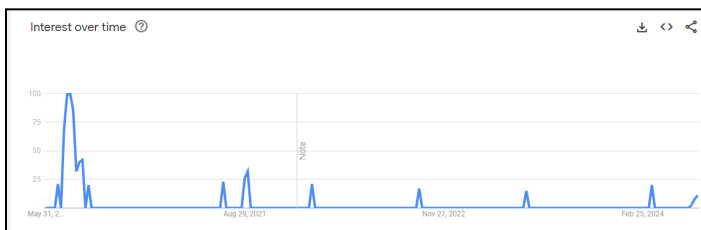

Figure 9: Google Trends longitudinal graph indicating public interest for Assam Floods (Source: Google Trends website)

Both crises have a common cause: Climate change. Despite overwhelming scientific consensus and clear evidence of climate change and impacts, such as increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels, public interest often spikes during major events like Assam and Bihar floods and then quickly diminishes.

These patterns illustrate a significant challenge in maintaining sustained public attention and engagement with critical issues. The initial surge in interest and media coverage often fails to translate into long-term awareness and action, as newer events quickly overshadow these crises. This phenomenon underscores the importance of continuous and responsible media coverage, as well as sustained public and policy engagement to address these ongoing global challenges effectively.

V. DISCUSSION - REASONS FOR DESENSITISATION

While the reasons for the decline in interest for these events would be unique to their individual situations and their socio-political contexts, it is quite apparent that the inability to sustain momentum is something that warrants pro-active investigation beyond the usual argument pointing to our society having a "short cultural memory."

This is because the structure of our society and our individual mental faculties are biologically the same as they were centuries ago, however, the advent of technology and in particular the smartphone has supercharged the transfer of information by unprecedented levels. This endless relay of data in the form of images, videos, and articles has led to widespread emotional volatility and numbness, known in psychology as "desensitization" which has made us increasingly shortsighted or blase in our approach towards violent or tragic events with long-term and far-reaching implications. This is reflected in the jarring declines in interest for the aforementioned events as we saw on Google Trends.

A. Oversaturation of the News-Stream

Due to the 24 hour news cycle and the predominance of news as the leading genre of content on social media platforms, the average consumer is routinely exposed to graphic depictions of violence and death. While studies support the argument that incessant news flashes about high-stress events can lead to heightened sensitivity amongst viewers (Hwang et al., 2021), there's also evidence that suggests that the same can lead to emotional numbness as a coping mechanism, resulting in a blunted response to news stories regarding real-life violent events (Scharrer, 2008)

"There is some new breaking news everytime I turn on the channels, it's hard not to get overwhelmed and just zone out. *Harr dinn kuch naya*…how are we supposed to keep up?," said Ruchika Garg, 47, a resident of Vaishali, Delhi NCR, who was interviewed for this study.

Mrs. Ruchika's concerns underscore the complex dynamics of the news cycle that make us predisposed to desensitization. As new crises emerge, they quickly capture media attention, pushing ongoing issues into the background. Thus, even when the pre-existing issues haven't been resolved, media's attention will move on to the next immediate crisis at that moment.

This causes two concurrent issues – not only is there an oversaturation that leads to each individual piece of news getting diminishing attention, viewers could also be developing a tolerance for violence and becoming increasingly habituated to graphic news stories. This prioritization of new stories over ongoing conflicts leads to a rapid decline in coverage as the

initial shock wears off. Furthermore, the public has a limited attention span; once the immediate urgency of an event fades, interest naturally wanes. "The 24-hour news cycle has exacerbated the public's limited attention span, causing interest to wane once the immediacy of a crisis diminishes" (McCluskey et al., 2016)

B. Compassion Fatigue

Another cause of mass desensitization is the rise of a phenomenon called "compassion fatigue" is. Continuous exposure to distressing news can lead to desensitization, where the audience becomes emotionally numb to suffering, causing them to disengage from ongoing coverage.

While the term was originally coined for healthcare professionals, it has increasingly expanded to encompass the responses and behaviour of individuals exposed to stories of traumatic incidents over a long period of time as well. "Repeated exposure to traumatic events in the news leads to emotional numbness and disengagement, a phenomenon known as compassion fatigue" (Rauvola et al., 2019). Emotional overload from repeatedly engaging with traumatic events also causes individuals to disconnect as a protective measure for their mental health.

C. Institutional Apathy and Public Hopelessness

Arising from a long-term state of bureaucratic lethargy and institutional indifference, the general lack of or delay in resolution of crises often leads to individuals internalizing that indifference – when this happens on a macro level, it could lead to mass desensitization to those issues.

Christopher Ojeda, in his seminal study on the topic, noted "The feelings of hopelessness associated with depression could, in the political domain, translate to a low level of internal efficacy (e.g., "I'm incapable of making a difference") or a low level of external efficacy (e.g., "government doesn't care what I think") or both" (Ojeda, 2015)

This is reflected in evidence that suggests a pervasive sentiment of hopelessness, especially amongst the youth regarding historic, long-standing conflicts and complex issues like climate change. (Hickman et al., 2021) Studies show that during the coronavirus crisis, economic disruptions could have led to a number of people developing increased anxiety, depression, and hopelessness due to prolonged unresolved social and economic issues. (Brenner & Bhugra, 2020)

When problems appear unsolvable or beyond the influence of the average person, disengagement follows as individuals feel their attention or action will not make a difference. Lack of visible progress also contributes to this decline; when media reports fail to show significant advancements or resolutions, the story becomes repetitive and less engaging – all of it culminating in desensitisation and a state of detachment towards crisis.

D. Misinformation

Misinformation plays a critical role in further desensitizing and disillusioning the public. The pervasive spread of misinformation exacerbates public distrust in media, leading to skepticism about the accuracy of news reports. This gets turned up by several degrees of magnitude on internet-based forums and social media platforms, where information travels at an increased pace compared to more traditional forms of media.(Brannon & Roy, 2024)

Sneha Chopra, 21, a student interviewed for the study, said "The concept of fake news has really taken off since the pandemic, there are so many versions of the same story – many of them distorting the truth while some straight misleading. Its tiring to have to constantly fact-check what you see on Instagram."

This constant bombardment of false or misleading information can make it challenging to discern the truth, leading to confusion and a general sense of apathy towards important issues. As misinformation circulates, it can also create fatigue among readers who feel overwhelmed by conflicting reports, ultimately leading to disengagement. These factors collectively contribute to the rapid decline in public interest and media coverage of significant events, highlighting the challenges in maintaining sustained engagement and action on critical issues.

VI.   EFFECTS OF DESENSITISATION

To understand the scale of the situation, it is important that we approach the growing desensitisation of the masses towards violence, death and large-scale events as not only as a temporary psychological or physiological product of the internet age but rather as a deeply-entrenched social issue that is only going to snowball and seep into our cultural and institutional processing of and response to emergencies and calamities in the future.

A. Reduced Public Awareness

Studies show that there are direct links between media coverage and public behavior – When media coverage about a certain issue wanes, the public awareness of ongoing crises diminishes. Desensitisation to violence often reduces its significance in the public eye, each consecutive act of violence or news has diminishing returns in terms of the attention it gets. Studies show that desensitisation induced by prolonged exposure to violent

media, reduces the likelihood of helping behavior. (Bushman & Anderson, 2009)

"I feel there is definitely a loss of morale amongst people of my age. It appears like things don't change. We all see something tragic happen, people die in a completely avoidable bridge collapse for instance, and we pretend to be shocked for a minute. Then the world moves on and we forget about it," Sneha observed, voicing the collective frustrations of many from her generation.

While a pursuit of sustaining the public's attention in an attempt to stave off desensitization may seem far-fetched, there is historical precedent that supports it.. Consider Kerala Floods (2018) as an example of how sustained media coverage and public mobilization can drive significant improvements in crisis situations. In August 2018, severe flooding in Kerala caused widespread devastation. Continuous media coverage, especially on social media platforms, highlighted the urgent need for help, which led to an outpouring of support from across India and the world. Crowdfunding platforms raised substantial funds, while individuals, celebrities, and corporations provided generous financial assistance. Volunteers and NGOs coordinated rescue operations, distributed essential supplies, and aided in rebuilding efforts.

Conversely, an incident that highlights the grave consequences of insufficient sustained media coverage is The Muzaffarpur Shelter Home Scandal (2018) where numerous girls were being sexually abused at a government-funded shelter home in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. Despite the severity of the crimes, the scandal did not initially garner extensive national media attention.potentially exposing more vulnerable individuals to similar abuses. This case underscores the dire consequences of insufficient media coverage and public awareness in addressing and preventing serious social injustices.

Without continuous coverage, vital issues such as the Assam and Bihar floods, the Sudan civil war, and climate change risk falling off the public radar. When these issues are not consistently highlighted, they receive less attention from the general population, leading to a diminished sense of urgency and importance. This lack of attention can impede public understanding and empathy towards those affected by these crises, ultimately hindering mobilization and support efforts.

B. Spread of Misinformation

Desensitisation is an outcome, as discussed in the "Causes" section of this paper, but also a catalyst for misinformation. Desensitisation and a lack of active engagement or following up on the status of issues tends to leave a knowledge gap that is often filled by misinformation, myths, and long-harbored prejudices. The decline in coverage of significant events perpetuates uninformed discussions that create a feedback loop where incomplete information creates factually incorrect and harmful portrayals of certain topics that influence people who in turn propagate them further to other people – its a self-sustaining cycle that keeps on distorting facts.

Being exposed to multiple variants of the same piece of information can further desensitize and disillusion the public, creating another feedback loop where misinformation leads to decreased engagement, and decreased engagement allows misinformation to proliferate.

A relevant example in India is the aftermath of the COVID-19 second wave in 2021. Initially, the media extensively covered the crisis, highlighting the lack of oxygen supplies and hospital beds, which led to a surge in public support and international aid. However, as media attention shifted away and there was a decline in public engagement with the issue, there was a parallel rise in misinformation circulating online about the pandemic's status and inadequate follow-up support for affected communities. (Sharma, 2022)

C. Implications for Policy and Planning

The most critical issue stemming from a mass desensitization is a potential information blindspot that leaves our institutions and populace ill-equipped and un-prepared to tackle crises of similar proportions in the future were they to happen again – the idiom "history repeats itself" is worth noting here, as without properly processing news and without rigorously assessing how certain events transpired, we are exposed to potential lapses in planning and even threats to national security.

Studies show that there is a link between media coverage and policy reforms. Without sustained media attention, policymakers may deprioritize these issues, resulting in delayed or inadequate responses.(Yanovitzky, 2002) For instance, the decline in coverage of climate change can lead to normalization of the issue, allowing political complacency in the matter. In the United States, movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) and #MeToo have demonstrated how continuous media attention can maintain public focus on critical social issues, leading to widespread protests, policy changes, and cultural shifts. Media coverage of BLM brought issues of racial injustice and police brutality to the forefront, resulting in police reforms in several cities, increased accountability for law enforcement, and a broader societal reckoning with systemic racism. The #MeToo movement highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, leading to the downfall of numerous powerful individuals,

changes in workplace policies, and heightened awareness about sexual misconduct.

Similarly, in India, the Nirbhaya case (2012) and the Sushant Singh Rajput case (2020) exemplify how persistent media coverage and public engagement can lead to significant legal and social outcomes. The Nirbhaya case, with its extensive media coverage, ignited nationwide protests and debates on women's safety, leading to the establishment of the Justice Verma Committee and subsequent legal reforms enhancing the safety and rights of women. The Sushant Singh Rajput case, fueled by media and social media campaigns, prompted thorough investigations by multiple agencies and sparked widespread public discourse on issues like mental health and nepotism in the entertainment industry.

D. Impact on Funding and Support

Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian agencies rely heavily on media coverage to raise awareness and funds for their causes. When media interest declines, these organizations struggle to attract the attention and financial support needed to address ongoing crises effectively. The decline in public interest can lead to reduced donations and support, impacting the ability of these organizations to deliver aid and implement long-term solutions.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Due to the covert nature and systemic reinforcement of the phenomenon, there is no "quick fix" or instant remedy to mass desensitisation. It is a long-term issue that exists both on a macro as well as a micro level. Addressing the decline in public interest requires an interrogation of individual responsibility of each citizen as well as the external forces that have conditioned us to violence, death and large-scale disasters. This would require a multi-pronged approach that involves media organizations, policymakers, educators, and the public. Here are some potential solutions:

A. Ethical Media Strategies and Policies

The need of the hour is for media outlets to pivot towards a more responsible form of journalism, if that comes to fruition, the problem of desensitisation could be contained to a substantial degree. Media outlets should commit to sustained reporting on critical issues. This includes regular updates on ongoing crises, even when they are not in the immediate news cycle. Media organizations could adopt the "constructive journalism" model (Mast et al., 2018), focusing on in-depth reporting that provides context and follow-up stories. Ensuring a balance between new and ongoing stories can help maintain public interest by highlighting both immediate crises and long-term issues.

"News channels need to realize the responsibility they have towards the viewers, being the most popular source of information for billions across the country and around the globe, its important that we maintain integrity and practice rigour, thoroughness and authenticity in our reporting. This can only be possible through reforms in the current structure of the media industry," said Sandeepan Roy, a journalist working in Noida at one of the major news outlets.

Governments can provide support for public media organizations that are less driven by commercial pressures and more focused on public interest journalism. Funding and legislative measures can ensure these organizations have the resources to cover important issues comprehensively

B. Public Engagement and Education

The onus also lies on us as individuals to be responsible and informed citizens of the world – while the media and social media platforms have put in place unethical journalistic practices and manufactured algorithmic volatility that shape a lot of what we see with regards to news, there are certainly certain principles we can imbibe and apply in our day to day life.

This would require first Increasing media literacy among the masses can help individuals critically evaluate news sources and discern misinformation. Specialized educational programs and campaigns can teach people how to identify credible sources and understand media biases. Advocacy groups and NGOs can run public awareness campaigns to keep critical issues in the spotlight, utilizing social media, public events, and partnerships with media organizations to reach a broader audience.

Encouraging citizen-driven reporting and community journalism can help bring attention to local issues that may not be covered by mainstream media, empowering local journalists and community members to report on significant events.

C. Increased regulation of social media-oriented tech corporations

While traditional media houses continue to have an outsized influence on the way a majority of the country consumes information, digital social media platforms operated and owned by multinational tech giants are increasingly dictating the terms of journalism and media, the algorithm continually reinforcing our individual and shared biases and cultivating echo chambers and festering divide in society.

"There certainly needs to be some form of regulation for social media platforms, especially for news pages on sites like Instagram and Twitter, which are overflowing with so-called news - much of it is just celebrity gossip and other frivolous content that gets them more clicks and views so they push it. But it does lower the overall quality of news and the important stories get lost in the noise. There needs to be limits to posting or some regulation certainly," remarked Sneha.

Algorithms are specifically engineered to enhance user engagement, which in turn increases advertising revenue for social media companies. Shoshana Zuboff, in her book "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" states that "the new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales." (Zuboff, 2018). Social media platforms embody this economic model, with their constant stream of personalized content designed to keep users engaged, often at the expense of exposing them to diverse perspectives, thus exacerbating misinformation and social fragmentation.

To address these issues, regulatory measures are essential to ensure transparency and accountability in algorithmic design. Policies should promote diverse and balanced content, requiring social media platforms to disclose their algorithmic processes and incentivize the prioritization of factual and unbiased information over sensationalism. Policymakers can also work with social media platforms to ensure their algorithms promote diverse and credible news sources, reducing the echo chamber effect and ensuring that important issues receive the attention they deserve.

VIII. CONCLUSION

My paper was aimed at exploring the complex relationship between the dissemination of violent media, public response to that kind of media, and its subsequent impact on policy. My findings posit that the phenomenon of desensitization is driven by the relentless churn of the 24-hour news cycle and the algorithmic dynamics of social media. This leads to a rapid decline in public interest and engagement with critical issues.

In the paper I have established my perspective that being repeatedly unable to process large-scale events involving widespread upheaval and death is not a "moral failing", but rather a structural vulnerability and a security threat that can allow those events to get repeated due to a lack of deliberation over the issues and their implications, thereby adversely impacting our level of preparedness and keeping effective preventative measures from being put in place.

Hence, there is an urgent need for more responsible journalism and sustained media coverage to maintain public awareness and drive meaningful change. The qualitative interviews conducted for my study reaffirm the importance of media literacy and critical engagement among the public to counteract the effects of misinformation and compassion fatigue. The research points to the necessity for regulatory measures to ensure that social media platforms promote diverse and credible news sources. Ultimately, addressing mass desensitization requires a multi-faceted approach involving media organizations, policymakers, educators, and the public. By recognizing and tackling this issue, society can better prepare for and respond to large-scale events, ensuring that they receive the sustained attention and action they warrant. This study serves as a call to action for all stakeholders to foster a more informed, empathetic, and engaged public, capable of driving effective and lasting change in the face of global challenges.

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