Research on the Cultural Value of Public Response: Analysis of Government and Media Strategies in Public Emergencies

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Abstract: Public emergencies, from pandemics to natural disasters, pose significant challenges to societies. Understanding public responses to these crises is crucial for effective mitigation and recovery. Our main objective is to examine the cultural value of public response with a focus on government and media strategies in public emergencies. Our study adopted a mixed methods approach involving qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, textual analysis and media analysis. Our findings revealed a complex interplay between cultural values, media framing, and public response. Collectivistic societies exhibited stronger community cohesion and adherence to public health measures, while individualistic societies showed greater emphasis on individual choices. Risk perception significantly influenced precautionary actions, with higher perceived risks leading to earlier interventions. Media narratives emphasizing heroism and resilience fostered empathy and support, while those highlighting violence or economic anxieties increased fear and demands for accountability. The study highlights the multifaceted nature of public responses to crises, shaped by the intricate interplay of cultural values, media narratives, and individual perceptions.
Keywords: Cultural values, media framing, public response, crisis and government

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout The basis of modern conception of public views and opinion has its existence from the roots of liberal democratic theories formulated in the 18th century with precursors linked to the ancient Greece (Erikson & Tedin, 2019; Palmer, 1936). Although, the relationships between empirical public opinions and views and the political theory have been missing and poorly documented. The significant research and emphasis by researchers such as Berelson (1952), Lazarsfield (1957) and Noelle-Neumann (1979) on public opinion has revolutionised the interpretation and integration of public opinion with empirical philosophical models (Berelson, 1952; Lazarsfeld, 1957; Noelle-Neumann, 1979). The notion of public opinion or views was coined during the Enlightenment era; however, the separate ideas of *public* and *opinion* have existed for several centuries. According to Price (1992), *public* and *opinion*

have a variety of meanings which is dependent on their applications and use to the modern times (Price, 1992). *Opinion* can be used to infer two distinct meanings, initially, from an epistemological perspective, *opinion* defines a particular and to a certain degree reflects an inferior way of distinguishing a form of judgment or knowing about a matter derived from facts or assertions of faith. Secondly, opinion can be used to infer a sense of regard, esteem or reputation on the basis of holding a higher opinion than someone else. Therefore, the two views of opinion refer to the concept of judgment; however, in the first definition the focus is on the uncertainty associated with the truth about something while in the second definition, the focus is on the moral dimensions of judgment subject to approval or censure (Ergasheva, 2019). Political theories and governments seize on these definitions of opinion with a different perspective of cognition and influence the information related to moral sentiments and judgments (Adams & Lasseigne, 2018). The concept of *public* originates from the Latin word "*Publicus*" implying 'the people' and can be inferred to have different meanings based on various applications. In the early uses of the term public, it referred to common and shared access in open areas to the general population (Habermas, 1991; Russell, 2019). In other situations, the usage of the word "public" refers to the common and shared interests in the common good, albeit independent of the concept of access or belonging, but based on the sense of representation (i.e., in the name of) the whole of the population. During Monarchy, the monarch based on the principles of royal absolutism was the sole public figure that represented the divine right of the entire Kingdom and all its people (Baker, 1990). According to Price (2008), the compound idea of *public opinion* was widely adopted in the 18th century since it was a product of the historical patterns of several centuries particularly in the growth and development of literacy (Price, 2008), expansion of merchant and trade classes, the Reformation of Protestants and the increased literature and publishing works. The emergence of high literate European merchants, development of institutions such as salons and coffeehouses encouraged the spread of new liberal philosophies that were grounded on the basis of individual freedoms, assertion of individual interests in political and governance affairs and the constant criticisms of royal absolutisms (Habermas, 1991). In the early times, the use of the term public opinion referred to the fundamental social customs and manners associated with the constant growing class of prosperity advocated for by the "men of letters",however, at the end of the 18th century, public opinion had shifted towards a political and governance context and associated with other phrases such as

"common will", and "public conscience." According to Baker (1990), the dissolution and dismissal of the absolute powers of the monarchy, the crown and all its similar components invoked the concept ofpublic opinion as a new and idealist source of authoritarian rule and affirmed the legitimacy of their rules based on rhetoric and no reference to fixed sociological references (Baker, 1990; Yongetal., 2022). Therefore, the utilisation of the term public opinion was vague to a certain extent and was explicitly linked to the open and free discussions of political views and affairs of educated men who had financial means. Public philosophy defines engagement with the public or the general population. According to Weinstein, public philosophy is associated with the philosophy of the general audience in non-academic and institutionalised settings (Weinstein, 2014). Therefore, public philosophy is that which is undertaken in the public venues dealing with any issue or area of philosophy. However, Sandel proposed that public philosophy consists of two components; initially, it involves findings in the legal and political controversies of everyday activities involving philosophy. Secondly, it involves bringing the moral aspects and combining with political philosophy to create a bearing on the contemporary public opinions (Sandel, 2006). In the works of James Tully, he acknowledges that public philosophy must be achieved through constant practice, the contested aspects and principles of citizenship, civic freedom and non-violence (Tully, 2008). Sharon Meagher's views on the networks of public philosophy suggests that it does not only involve doing philosophy in the general public but also engaging with the local communities and people (Meagher, 2013). Weinstein proposes that although it is common to argue that public philosophy encourages the development of democracy, it should not be assumed that philosophers are better citizens compared to non- philosophers (Weinstein, 2022). In his views, Weinstein demands an increase in the acknowledgement of podcasts and other general public audiences seriously as elements of contributions to philosophy. The works of interviews, podcasts, blogs, books and academic journals by the public are critical factors in contributing to public philosophy. In the public space, Weinstein proposes two fundamental concepts; initially, he uses the term "informal fallacy" of "I Got Mine Jack, fallacy" which relates to the basis of a solution working perfectly for some individuals, then it does not imply that the same solution can be applied to all individuals. The reasoning behind this concept is that it appeals to authority with the assumption that the individual who makes the error disregard their experience as normal. Moreover, it can be viewed as a perspective of generalizing from the particular, in that a particular instance

is fallaciously considered a representation of others (Chen, 2020; Weinstein, 2014). The epistemological perspectives of public emergencies allow researchers to reflect on the construction and dissemination of knowledge (Donovan, 2021; Fortaleza, 2021). According to Stuart Mill's seminal works on the marketplace and liberty (Niesen, 2019), he advocates for the elements of free expression and argues that in the marketplace of ideas, the presence of different opinions is not merely tolerated but critical for societal progress (Hill, 2018). In the context of public emergencies, Mill's ideas are of a greater significance and focus. The divergent public views and opinions ranging from expert analyses to the grassroots views constitute the backdrop against which governments and mainstream advocates their responses. Mill emphasizes the importance of free expression as a critical necessity for the platform of different voices emanating from the public, particularly, during crisis (Turley, 2022). Although, this freedom is not always absolute because it is bounded and controlled by the principles of harm; hence, these limitations can be imposed to avoid harm to others. In the realms of axiology, the philosophical views on public opinion have a crucial role in shaping the strategies used by media and government in response to various crisis. The ideas of Stuart Millon individual liberty and the principles of harm can be combined with Weinstein's ideas on moral responsibility on public officials and government to regulate the values driven by public responses (Niesen, 2019). The conflict between the values of solidarity, collective responsibility and individual duty is a philosophical dilemma that seeks to unravel the relationship between cultural norms and strategies adopted by government and media outlets. The utilitarian views of Bentham are also critical in shaping the axiological perspective of public opinion (Niesen, 2022). In his utilitarian calculus, Bentham acknowledges the pursuit of the greatest happiness for the largest number which can be translated into the context of public emergencies where the underlying values and principles of public responses should be aligned with the utilitarian view of optimising the overall well-being of many people. The philosophy of Bentham necessitates a further exploration into how the governments and mainstream media consider the ethical implications of their strategies and the overall well-being of the public.

1.1. Objective and Rationale

Our study is based on the recognition of the delicate relationship between strategies used by the media and government, cultural values and the philosophical basis of public emergencies. The existence of dynamic

responses to crisis requires a multidimensional perspective that extends beyond the conventional views. Our study seeks to drawn from the philosophical views of John Stuart Mill, Jack Russel Weinstein, Michael A. Weinstein, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger to examine the epistemological, ethical, axiological and metaphysical aspects of decision-making processes (Niesen, 2019; Rousseau, 1968; Weinstein, 2018; Weinstein, 2014). The rationale of our study is based on the contribution to the academic discourse and practical insights on crisis management. Thus, the main objective of our study is to enhance the awareness of the underlying values that shape societal responses, fostering a more profound comprehension of the ethical considerations, epistemological challenges, axiology, and metaphysical challenges that constitute the complex aspects of emergency governance and media practices.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study Design

Our study adopted a mixed methods approach involving qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Qualitative data involved the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of individuals directly affected by various emergencies through semi-structured interviews with specific focus group ofparticipants. Moreover, the focus group discussions allowed explorations of shared narratives and cultural views in response to various crisis. In contrast, quantitative data were collected to complement the qualitative data by analysing media representations of emergency including the coverage and social media posts to comprehend how the event was framed and perceived by the public. Moreover, document analysis was performed on official government reports and policy statements on decision-making processes and underlying values of government actions.

2.2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were issued to capture the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of the individuals directly impacted by various public emergencies in China. We designed interview guides covering a wide range of themes from personal experiences and challenges, government perceptions and media response to crisis, cultural values and beliefs. We collaborated with local researchers and officials to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. All interviews were available in

English and Mandarin. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by experienced professionals. The transcription process was anonymized and the data was securely stored in a cloud platform.

2.3. Media Analysis

We performed a comprehensive analysis encompassing traditional media, social media and online government platforms. Traditional media consisted of analysing news coverage from national and regional newspapers, television broadcasts and radio programs with attention on state-owned and independent media outlets. Social media analysis involved platforms such as Weibo, WeChat and Douyin on public comments and aspects of emergency. Online government platforms involved official statements, press-releases and social media platforms from government agencies on the official narratives and strategies used for communication. The analysis focused on the framing techniques used by different media channels and paying attention to the choice of language, use of visuals and emphasis on aspects of that particular event. Moreover, public reactions were examined for immediate unfiltered and unedited views from the general public on emergency situations including expressions of concern, solidarity and criticism.

2.4. Document and Textual Analysis

Document and textual analysis involved documents obtained from the national governments (policy statements, directives, reports and press releases), similar documents from the regional governments consisting of regional and provincial authorities to examine variations in public response. Lastly, expert reports and analyses from NGOs and institutions were examined for interpretations on how the government handled various crisis. The analyses were focused on decision-making processes and the basis for various government actions, key priorities, risk assessment and justification for policies. Furthermore, analysis of how the emergencies were framed in all forms of official communication paying attention to the choice of language and cultural biases of narrations.

2.5. Data Analysis

Triangulation of the data was performed to combine the data obtained from media analysis with document and textual analyses to examine the effects of public response to emergency and the cultural dimensions involved. Thematic analyses involved identifying recurrent themes and

patterns across the data to identify the cultural views and values linked with public response to emergency. Lastly, narrative analysis and critical discourse analysis was performed to explore the sense of individual responses and media representations.

3. RESULTS

Our findings involved public emergencies drawn from various perspectives such as natural disasters of floods, health crisis such as the covid-19 pandemic and disease outbreak, technological accidents. The results were presented in Tables as shown;

Table 1: Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing and Public Sentiments in Response to Covid-19.

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Prioritizing individual freedom vs. communal well-being	Refusal to wear masks or get vaccinated vs. strong adherence to public health measures
Risk Perception	High vs. low perceived risk of infection	Early adoption of precautionary measures vs. downplaying severity and delaying action
Trust in Authority	High vs. low trust in government and health officials	Compliance with government mandates vs. seeking alternative information sources and
Media Frame Scientific Consensus and Heroism	Description Emphasis on expert advice and frontline workers' efforts	skepticism Public Sentiment Confidence in scientific institutions and appreciation for healthcare workers
Economic and Social Impacts	Focus on job losses, school closures, and social isolation	Anxiety, frustration, and anger towards economic consequences
Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories	Spread of false information and distrust in official narratives	Confusion, fear, and vaccine hesitancy

In Table 1, our study revealed a complex interplay between cultural values, media framing, and public sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals prioritizing individualism over collectivism exhibited resistance to mask-wearing and vaccinations contrasting with strong adherence to public health measures in more collectivistic societies. High risk perception led to early precautionary actions, while those perceiving the risk aslowdownplayed the severity and delayed action. Trust in authority influenced compliance with government mandates, with those

lacking trust seeking alternative information and harbouring scepticism. Media framing played a significant role with scientific consensus and heroism narratives fostering confidence in science and appreciation for healthcare workers. However, economic and social impact framing increased anxiety, frustration, and anger, while misinformation and conspiracy theories sowed confusion, fear, and hesitation to vaccinations.

Table 2: Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing and Public Sentiment in Response to the Recession

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Materialism vs. Frugality	Emphasis on acquiring possessions vs. prioritizing essential needs	Increased consumer spending driven by fear of missing out vs. adopting frugal habits and saving
Work Ethic and Individual Responsibility	Belief in hard work leading to success vs. blaming external factors for economic hardship	Focus on personal effort and job search vs. demands for government intervention
Long-Term vs. Short- Term Perspective	Planning for the future vs. focusing on immediate needs	Increased investments and saving for future crises vs. prioritizing basic necessities
Media Frame Focus on Individual Stories and Resilience	Description Highlighting personal struggles and overcoming challenges	hort-term survival Public Sentiment Hope and inspiration despite economic hardship
Political And Economic Analysis	Examining causes and potential solutions	Frustration with government policies and demands for economic reforms
Potential For Violence	Potential for social instability	Fear,anxiety, and concerns about public safety

In Table 2, in the face of the economic recession, our analysis revealed diverse responses shaped by cultural values and media narratives. Materialistic individuals engaged in increased spending driven by "fear of missing out," while frugal individuals adopted saving habits and prioritized essential needs. Belief in the work ethic led some to focus on personal effort and job searches, while others blamed external factors and demanded government intervention. Long-term planners invested for future crises, while those focused on short-term survival prioritized basic necessities. Media's focus on individual stories of resilience instilled hope, while political and economic analyses increased frustration and demands for reforms.

Table 3: Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing and Public Sentiment

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Expression vs. Order	Emphasis on freedom of expression vs. maintaining social order	Adherence to established hierarchies and disapproval of violence
Tolerance for Dissent	Acceptance of diverse viewpoints vs. intolerance of opposing opinions	Openness to dialogue and compromise vs. polarization and escalation of conflict
Civil Responsibility vs. Personal Gain	Prioritizing community well-being vs. seeking personal advantage	Participation in societal change vs. opportunistic looting and violence
Media Frame	Description	Public Sentiment
Focus on Demands and Grievances	Highlighting reasons behind the public frustrations	Empathy and support for demands vs. condemnation of violence and calls for law and order
Focus on Violence and Property Damage	Emphasizing negative consequences and potential escalation	Fear, insecurity, and disapproval of violent actions
Framing as Political vs. Criminal Activity	Portraying as legitimate political expression vs. crimi nal activi ty	Increased political engagement and solidarity for cause vs. calls for stricter law enforcement and harsher penalties

In Table 3, our analysis identified complex interactions between cultural values, media framing, and public sentiment. Individuals valuing expression over order were found to actively participate in governance, while those prioritizing order disapproved of violence and adhered to established hierarchies. Tolerance for dissent fostered openness to dialogue and compromise, while its absence led to polarization and conflict. Media framing played a crucial role, with a focus on demands and grievances garnering empathy, while emphasizing violence and property damage instilled fear and disapproval.

Table 4(a): Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing and Public Sentiment in response to Floods

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Collectivism vs. Individualism	Prioritizing community needs over individual survival vs. prioritizing self- preservation	Strong community cooperation and resource sharing vs. individual evacuation attempts and disregard for others
Risk Perception	High vs. low perception of flood risk	Early preparedness and evacuation vs. underestimating the danger and delayed response

Table 4(b): Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing and Public Sentiment in response to Floods

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Respect for Nature	High vs. low regard for the environment and its forces	Accepting floods as natural events and adapting to them vs. blaming human actions and resisting adaptation
Media Frame	Description	Public Sentiment
Focus on Heroism and Resilience	Highlighting acts of courage and community spirit during the disaster	Gratitude for rescue workers and sense of unity in overcoming challenges
Focus on Infrastructure Failures and Governme nt Response	Criticizing inadequate infrastructure and emergency response	Frustration with authorities and demands for accountability
Focus on Environmental Factors and Climate Change	Linking flood to climate change and unsustainable practices	Increased awareness of environmental risks and calls for action

In Table 4, our examination of flood responses revealed interplay between cultural values, media narratives, and public sentiment. Collectivistic communities exhibited strong cooperation and resource sharing, contrasting with individualistic societies where self-preservation dominated. High risk perception led to early preparedness and evacuation, while those downplaying the risk delayed action. Respect for nature encouraged accepting floods and adaptation, while those blaming human actions resisted adaptation. Media framing played a role with narratives of heroism and resilience fostering gratitude and unity, while criticisms of infrastructure and government response increased frustration and demands for accountability. Additionally, focusing on environmental factors and climate change raised awareness and calls for action.

Table 5(a): Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing, and Public Sentiment in Response during the Shanxi Mine Collapse

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Safety Culture and Accountability	Strong emphasis on safety regulations and holding responsible parties accountable	Demanding stricter safety measures and transparency from mining companies
Collective Responsibility vs. Individual Blame	Shared responsibility for ensuring safety vs. blaming individual workers or managers	Community mourning and calls for systemic change in the mining industry

Table 5(b): Public Response by Cultural Values, Media Framing, and Public Sentiment in Response during the Shanxi Mine Collapse

Cultural Value	Description	Impact on Public Response
Prioritization of Economic Growth vs. Worker Safety	Emphasis on economic development and productivity over worker safety	Concerns about economic impact of mine closure and potential conflicts between safety and economic priorities
Media Frame	Description	Public Sentiment
Focus on Human Cost and Emotional Impact	Highlighting stories of victims and their families	Grief, anger, and demands for justice
Focus on Technical Causes and Potential Cover-Ups	Investigating technical failures and potential negligence	Distrust of official investigations and calls for independent inquiries
Focus on Wider Systemic Issues and Industry Reforms	Examining systemic problems in the mining industry and calling for reforms	Demands for stricter regulations, improved safety standards, and better working conditions

In Table 5, in the aftermath of the Shanxi mine collapse, our study exposed a complex interplay of cultural values, media framing, and public sentiment. A strong safety culture demanding accountability increased for stricter measures and transparency. Collective responsibility led to community mourning and calls for systemic change, contrasting with those prioritizing economic growth who expressed concerns about mine closure and economic impact. Media framing played a significant role, with a focus on the human cost triggering grief, anger, and demands for justice. Scrutiny of technical causes and potential cover-ups bred distrust and calls for independent investigations. Additionally, highlighting wider systemic issues led to demands for stricter regulations, improved safety standards, and better working conditions in the mining industry.

4. DISCUSSION

Our study has analysed the public responses to various crises ranging from hospital crisis to technological crises and found key trends that highlight the influence of cultural values, media framing and individual perceptions. Across all scenarios we found public anxiety regarding safety, health and economic prosperity as shared concerns of common interests. Although, the responses were divergent based on cultural values, the collectivist societies showed stronger community cooperation and

adherence to measures of public health. In contrast, individualist societies had greater focus on self-preservation and individual choices. The perception of risks was also a critical factor with those individuals who perceived higher risks taking precautions compared to their counterparts. Media framing was a significant aspect in shaping and determining public sentiments. Narratives focusing on resilience, heroes, heroism and human costs evoked feelings of empathy, support and gratitude from the general public. In contrast, media narratives that glorified violence, destruction of economy and cover-ups increased fear, demand for reforms and accountability from the government. Although cultural values offered a perspective for the interpretation and analysis of trends in public response, individual beliefs and concepts were divergent because others prioritized economic prosperity over safety, while other pursued systemic reforms over individualist views. According to Rousseau (1762/1968), public opinion was an abstract and super-human characteristic that was associated with the expression of common will (Rousseau, 1968), based on the divine principles of reason and debate. Lastly, it was linked as a significant robust technique for new tribunal used in checking and regulating the right actions as deemed by the actions of the state or government. Although, public opinion has as a communitarian perspective, the concept has acquired significant contemporary meanings from the philosophical works of liberals and utilitarian views of Stuart Mill (1820/1937) and Bentham (1838/1962) (Bentham, 1962; Niesen, 2019). These philosophers asserted that despite constant arguments for the complete and total publicity of government affairs, they advocated for freedom of expression and strongly believed that public opinion is the art of coming together based on shared and common will to reason together and pursue their collective interests and utilities. In his seminal work "The Social Contract", Rousseau suggests that the general will of the people should constitute the guiding principles of forming public opinions (Mbaji et al., 2023; Nikolakakis, 2023). He argues that when public opinion is consistent with the general will, then it is a reflection of the moral consciousness of the society. Thus, this concept can be applied to emergencies and it can be alluded that the works of Rousseau allows us to evaluate how governments and media control public sentiments and whether the ethical values embedded in the general will are used in the process of decision-making. Therefore, the alignment of public opinion with the general will is a critical component of ethical decision making. Our findings are consistent with previous studies (Christmas et al., 2020; Kim & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021) in proposing that Mill'sphilosophical views on dissemination of information to the public during crisis forms a

guiding basis for governments and media to overcome these challenges. The framing of various narratives is a delicate art that must be conveyed in a manner such that the stakeholders can perceive a balance between public perceptions and accurate information. According to Mill, there is a reason for the critical examination of competing ideas ranging from dissenting public voices to the authoritarian voices of officials and their roles in shaping the public understanding. Additionally, the emphasis by Mill's works on the role of trust in the marketplace of ideas is essentially significant during crisis (Kim & Gil de Zúñiga, 2021). In crisis, there is a lot of uncertainty that requires the maintenance and establishment of trust between media, general public and the government authorities. Government and mainstream media outlets face the challenges of disseminating information and fostering an essence of trust that is critical for effective and efficient communication during crisis. The insights of Stuart Mill offer a basis and guiding perspective for preserving the delicate balance between authoritative information and preservation ofpublic trust. Our findings align with previous studies (Hewitt, 2019; Sellnow & Seeger, 2021) in proposing that public emergencies involve various aspects of metaphysics associated with the analysis of risk, uncertainty and human agency to reveal the basic nature of reality. The metaphysical philosophy by Immanuel Kant suggests that the concept of categorical imperative emphasizes the inherent dignity and autonomy of an individual (Sunday Fasoro, 2019). In Kant's metaphysical views, the concepts of risk and uncertainty during emergencies allows researchers to examine how governments and the mainstream media respect and obey the moral agency of the general public. The philosophy of Kant raises several questions on whether the decisions made during crisis upholds the dignity of each individual and whether the metaphysical basis of autonomy are preserved during the uncertain challenges. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche focusing on eternal recurrence and the will to power allows another dimension to the metaphysical analysis of public opinion (McNeil, 2021). The works of Nietzsche allows us to examine the cyclical nature of crisis and the human capacity to exercise agency when encountered with constant and repeating challenges. The nature of how mainstream media and governments navigate the cyclical aspects of emergencies could empower individuals to exercise their power and will. Similarly, the philosophical works of Martin Heidegger on "existential phenomenology" examines the nature ofbeing and the concept of "thrownness" (Andersen & Arenfeldt, 2023). Application of the metaphysis of Heidegger to public emergencies allows us to understand the sense of thrownness experienced

by individuals when confronted with unseen crises. Governments and mainstream media must acknowledge the existence of this "thrownness" and the nature of human being to offer metaphysical frameworks used by the public in dealing with uncertainties. Our study proposes that the harmony in the collective interests of all individuals due to public opinion or views can be achieved by investing in public reasoning and achieving a consensual conclusion to the happiness of everyone. However, the emergence of the rule of majority used by governments, the concept of public opinion is sometimes undermined and evidenced in the governance principles of regular elections, referendums and plebiscite. In these scenarios, the government or state is viewed as a referee to all groups and individuals who aspire to attain their political and economic means. According to Held (1996, p. 95), there is a "key proposition" which presupposes that the collective good and benefit of all individuals can be achieved only when the individuals interact in a competitive exchange based on the principles of utility and minimal interference from the government (Held, 1996). Therefore, the concept of public opinion is conjoined to the liberal perspectives of an unregulated "common market of concepts and ideas" where the majority of views is affirmed by the popular vote as the fundamental operational basis. In its early development and use, the concept of public opinion formed a significant component of the Enlightenment era that was geared towards replacing European monarchies that had existed for thousands of years with civil monarchies and civil rule. According to Peters (1995), the Enlightenment era accomplished the transformation of classical assembly of populations and individuals in Athens into a mass-mediated and fictive body of newspapers that brought people together not on the basis of physical spaces but on the basis of shared stories and conversations despite long distances (Peters, 1995). Furthermore, Peters (1995, p. 16) suggested that the imaginative "public" is not based on the imaginary principles of symbolic representations of "the public" but it can come to reality as an actor (Peters, 1995). Therefore, implicitly, the concepts of public and public opinion were associated with the complete perspective of thoughts about the forms assumed by the "imaginative assemblies" from the high levels of communitarian views of the public as a fluid and amorphous group of freely associating citizens that are willing to think and discuss about good of the whole community. Criticisms about the government is capable of eroding the legitimacy of government while increasing collective action and the emergence of independent spheres within the public (Eickelman, 2003). Furthermore, there has been supporting evidence recorded in other

countries such as Poland (Millard, 1998), (Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 2013), in Mexico (Lawson, 2002) and the Islamic states (Howard, 2010). The fundamental question of allowing media criticism about the government or state affairs has been examined directly and indirectly by several scholars while taking into account the perspectives of the state and the society. In modern time, these voices are common due to the widespread and easy access to the Internet available worldwide. Previous studies (Esarey & Xiao, 2011; Xiao, 2011; Yang, 2010; Yang & Calhoun, 2007) have examined the activism and criticism about the government involving the citizens, social groups and non- governmental organizations. Although, the levels of advocating and championing for the grassroot levels of activism and criticism against the government are often low and does not offer a plausible explanation why the government or state permits public response through criticism. Criticism from the mainstream media is supposed to help the state generate and produce a positive image that acknowledges and solves all the problems associated with social and economic challenges. Additionally, previous studies (Liebman, 2005; Lorentzen, 2014) have suggested that the state or central government can utilise criticism emanating from the local authorities and officials to improve and enforce compliance with local laws and regulations. However, this is only possible by taking into account the interests of the central government. However, the central government has the final word in all aspects related to media, the local governments are always at the forefront of criticism compared to the central government due the production of local news on a daily basis and their operations. Moreover, there is limited studies on how local leaders such as county, municipal and provincial leaders use criticism emanating from the mainstream media. Our study suggests that public philosophy is heavily dependent on the philosophical reflections of ethics, transparency, accountability and the protection of vulnerable groups. Weinstein (2018) advocates for ethical considerations in the public life and governance by the state or ruling party (Weinstein, 2018). In public emergencies, ethical considerations are significant because there is higher possibility of manipulation to cover transparent aspects of public response, therefore, posing several ethical dilemmas. The discourse provided by Weinstein necessitates an exploration and analysis into how governments and mainstream media regulate and ensure the balance between openness in decision making and the strategic consequences of managing crisis. The ethical implications for transparency are juxtaposed against the pragmatic challenges of managing public perceptions while preserving social order during uncertainty. The ethical perspective extends beyond transparency

and includes accountability. Weinstein's views underpin the moral responsibility of public officials andinstitutions of governance to account for their decisions during crisis (Christmas et al., 2020; Kendra & Gregory, 2019). The principle of accountability forms a fundamental basis for evaluating the ethical decisions of government and mainstream media. Additionally, on Weinstein's discourse on ethics, there is an emphasis on protecting the vulnerable groups in the society. The focus is to protect those individuals who are susceptible to the adverse outcomes of emergencies in public situations. The moral basis lies in the complex and sophisticated decisions taken by the government in relation to certain demographic groups such as those who are disadvantaged socio-economically, marginal communities and those disproportionately affected by the crisis. An in-depth analysis of Weinstein's views and ideas can reveal how ethical considerations are linked with the strategies used in safeguarding the vulnerable members of the society.

5. CONCLUSION

Our study found that collectivistic societies exhibited stronger community spirit and adherence to public health measures, while individualistic societies saw greater emphasis on personal freedoms and choices. Risk perception also played a crucial role with higher perceived risks leading to earlier precautionary measures. Media narratives proved to be significant because emphasizing heroism, resilience, and human costs fostered empathy, gratitude, and calls for support. Conversely, highlighting violence, economic damage, or potential cover-ups increased fear, anger, and demands for accountability or reform. The study highlights the nature of public responses to floods, and health crisis highlighting the importance of considering cultural values and media narratives in promoting dialogue, understanding, and peaceful resolutions.

FUNDING

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