

**INTERPRETING LIVED EXPERIENCES AND  
EVOLUTION OF PANDEMIC COMMUNICATION: A  
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

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**BHARTI SCHOOL OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY &  
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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI**

**JULY 2025**

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**Interpreting Lived Experiences and Evolution of  
Pandemic Communication: A Hermeneutic  
Phenomenological Inquiry**

*by*

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*Submitted*

*in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

*to the*



**BHARTI SCHOOL OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY &  
MANAGEMENT**

**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI**

**JULY 2025**

DEDICATED TO  
GOD ALMIGHTY,  
MENTORS,  
AND MY FAMILY

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled “Interpreting Lived Experiences and Evolution of Pandemic Communication: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry” which is being submitted by **Sonal Arora** to the Bharti School of Telecommunications Technology & Management, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** (Ph.D.) is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her. She has worked under my supervision in conformity with the rules and regulations of the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. The research reports and results presented in the thesis have not been submitted in part or whole for the award of any degree or diploma in any other University or Institute.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*"No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude."*

*- Alfred North Whitehead*

Embarking on the journey to attain this degree has been a significant milestone for me, and I am deeply aware that this achievement is not mine alone. First and foremost, I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my research supervisor, Prof. Mahim Sagar, who has been not just a mentor but a guiding light through this challenging journey. Working with him has been an enriching and transformative experience, altering my perspective on research and life. Sir, your unwavering support and guidance, even during the toughest times, have been instrumental in reaching this day. Thank you for your patience, support, and faith in my ability to navigate the intricacies of a phenomenological inquiry. Dr. Pooja Sehgal, my industry co-supervisor, I extend my thanks for your willingness to co-guide me alongside Prof. Sagar. Your patience, kindness, responsiveness, and constructive criticism have played a pivotal role in shaping this comprehensive and insightful thesis. I am thankful for your invaluable expertise and guidance, and consider myself fortunate to have had you as my Co-supervisor.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my guru ji, Baba Gurinder Singh Dhillon (Radha Soami Satsang, Beas), whose unwavering guidance and divine blessings have illuminated my path throughout my life, shaping not just my intellect but my character. To the two remarkable women in my life, Mrs. Neelam Arora and Mrs. Sushma Kakkar, both advocates for education who instilled in me the importance of seeing things through to completion, I dedicate this work.

My husband, Mr. Gaurav Kakkar, has been a steadfast supporter, consistently urging me to "pursue and achieve." This dissertation is foremost dedicated to him. Equally significant is the role played by my son, Vedansh Kakkar, whose boundless energy and positivity were a constant source of motivation. Our joint study sessions, where he prepared for class tests and I

delved into my research, are moments I cherish. To the Kakkar and Arora families, thank you for believing in me, offering encouragement, and providing unwavering support throughout my Ph.D. journey.

My sincere appreciation goes to the members of my student research committee—Prof. Brejesh Lall, Prof. Harish Chaudhry, and Prof. Amit Mehndiratta—for their valuable feedback at various stages of my research journey. I thank the Bharti School of Telecom & Technology at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for providing the opportunity, resources, infrastructure, and facilities for my research.

I extend immense gratitude to the members of the project team— Ms. Charu Hasti, Ms. Swati Kaushik, Dr. Sarika Kaushal, Mr. Nishaant Sharma, Prof. Amit Mehndiratta, Prof. Amlendu Dubey, and Prof. Smita Kashiramka —whose significant contributions were indispensable. Their support enabled me to grasp the context crucial for designing my phenomenological study. I am also thankful to all the study participants who shared their valuable experiences on the topic, even during challenging times amidst COVID-19 pandemic. I hope my research has made a meaningful impact for them.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to my fellow researchers—Shefali Khare, Honey Yadav, Adithya Nukala, Amardeep Prasad, Richa Kondal, Priyanka Agarwal, Sarita S. Pasrija, Ajai Kumar S, Seema Raj, and project colleagues, Delma Momi, Shyamalambica, —and to seniors Dr. Deepshree, Dr. Shikha Kushwaha, Dr. Vishakha Chauhan, for their supportive presence, encouragement throughout this academic journey. Gratitude to Mr. Ashwani Sharma for generously providing the space for interview sessions, and heartfelt thanks to Om Prakash Bhaiya for his invaluable assistance in participant recruitment, and Mr. Amit Tiwari for his valuable IT support.

With deep gratitude,

***Sonal Arora***

## **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of communication in crisis response and management. Governments worldwide have made significant investments in this area. For example, the Indian government allocated Rs. 15,000 crores for the "India COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package" to enhance healthcare infrastructure and ensure effective communication and engagement with the public. Similarly, the UK government spent over £184 million on COVID-19-related communications in 2020 alone, emphasizing the importance of clear and consistent public messaging during the crisis. These substantial expenditures underscore the value placed on communication strategies to manage public health emergencies effectively. Despite these substantial investments in communication strategies, challenges persist in achieving desired behavioral norms, indicating yet again that good communication is necessary but not a sufficient condition and emphasizing the need to identify and address barriers to behavioral change. This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to explore the role of communication in shaping individuals' lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous research often focused on specific demographics such as patients, caregivers, nurses, students, and teachers within limited contexts, potentially constraining the broader applicability of their findings. While targeted research is essential for addressing specific communication needs, qualitative inquiries—particularly phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches—benefit from capturing a wide range of lived experiences across diverse demographic and socioeconomic groups. This study expands its scope by including participants from varied socioeconomic backgrounds in the Delhi National Capital Region, allowing for a richer exploration of how different individuals perceived and responded to communication during COVID-19. A diverse and sufficiently large qualitative sample enhances thematic saturation and ensures that the findings reflect a broader spectrum of experiences while remaining within the epistemological boundaries of qualitative

research. The rigor of this analysis lies in its methodical comparison and synthesis of emerging themes from contrasting participant groups, thereby significantly enriching the findings. This comprehensive approach has allowed the study to shed light on the pivotal role of communication during the pandemic, organized around three central themes: ‘Unveiling clarity amidst uncertainty’, ‘Overcoming barriers with effective messaging’, and ‘Enabling a return to normalcy’. The study employed data and methodological triangulation. to validate the findings through expert interviews and a narrative review of the literature. The findings of the study were compared against those of another state, Kerala, considering both people's and experts' perspectives through an integrative literature review. This research provides valuable insights for researchers and practitioners by examining the complexities of communication, including enabling and limiting factors, and important elements such as assessing audience readiness, pre-emptive planning, and understanding the context of the pandemic.

To answer the key research questions, this study has been conducted in three key phases. The first phase focuses on an exploratory study conducted wherein the role of communication was conceptualized in the public health crisis context using inductive inquiry. Phenomenological interviews (semi-structured, open-ended) were conducted with people of Delhi NCR. By delving into the interpretations of individuals in Delhi NCR regarding the role of communication in their lives during the Pandemic, this research elucidates key gaps in communication strategies and offers actionable insights across different stages of the crisis. These stages are delineated based on shifts in public sentiments observed throughout the pandemic with validation from communication and program experts interviewed post-interpretative phenomenological study with Delhi NCR residents. Additionally, secondary research on the phenomenon in Kerala corroborates the existence of these pandemic life stages of people’s sentiments.

The study establishes communication as a whole, inseparable from its context. Although communication played a positive and enabling role, as evidenced by themes extracted from people's interpretations of their life experiences associated with COVID-19-related communication, its role varied depending on socio-economic profiles and changing life situations during the phases of the COVID-19 phenomenon. This study situates participants' experiences within the broader field of research; while other studies focus on responses to stimuli or communication inputs aimed at target audiences. This thesis contributes to existing literature by providing a comprehensive exploration of communication dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic, grounded in the lived experiences of people across two Indian states.

Overall, the study findings underscore the critical role of communication in navigating the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic, from initial response efforts to long-term resilience-building, and provide valuable insights for future crisis communication strategies. Based on the findings, the study offers recommendations for policy and practice, including strategies for addressing stigma and discrimination, trust-building, and enhancing community resilience. These recommendations can guide future government communication initiatives and contribute to more effective public health responses.

## सारांश

कोविड-१९ महामारी ने संकट की स्थिति में संप्रेषण (कम्युनिकेशन) की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका को उजागर किया है। दुनिया भर की सरकारों ने इस क्षेत्र में बड़े पैमाने पर निवेश किया है। उदाहरण के लिए, भारत सरकार ने "भारत कोविड-१९ आपातकालीन प्रतिक्रिया और स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली तैयारी पैकेज" के तहत ₹१५,००० करोड़ आवंटित किए, ताकि स्वास्थ्य ढांचे को मजबूत किया जा सके और जनसंख्या के साथ प्रभावी संप्रेषण और भागीदारी सुनिश्चित की जा सके। इसी तरह, यूनाइटेड किंगडम सरकार ने केवल २०२० में ही कोविड-१९ से संबंधित संप्रेषण पर £१८४ मिलियन से अधिक खर्च किए, जिससे यह स्पष्ट होता है कि संकट के समय स्पष्ट और सुसंगत संदेशों को कितना महत्व दिया गया। ये बड़े निवेश यह दर्शाते हैं कि जनस्वास्थ्य आपात स्थितियों के प्रबंधन में संप्रेषण रणनीतियों को अत्यधिक महत्व दिया गया है।

हालांकि संप्रेषण रणनीतियों में इन बड़े निवेशों के बावजूद, वांछित व्यवहार संबंधी मानदंडों को प्राप्त करने में चुनौतियाँ बनी रहीं। पुरोहित और साहित्य में उल्लेख है कि अच्छी संप्रेषण रणनीतियों के बावजूद, कई लोगों ने आवश्यक व्यवहार मानकों का पालन नहीं किया, जिससे यह फिर स्पष्ट होता है कि प्रभावी संप्रेषण (कम्युनिकेशन) आवश्यक है, लेकिन अपने आप में पर्याप्त नहीं है। यह व्यवहार परिवर्तन की बाधाओं की पहचान और समाधान की आवश्यकता पर बल देता है।

यह **हरमेन्युटिक फिनोमेनोलॉजिकल** अध्ययन कोविड-१९ महामारी के दौरान लोगों के जीवन अनुभवों को आकार देने में संप्रेषण की भूमिका का अन्वेषण करने के उद्देश्य से किया गया। पूर्ववर्ती शोध प्रायः विशिष्ट जनसंख्या समूहों जैसे कि मरीजों, देखभालकर्ताओं, नर्सों, छात्रों और शिक्षकों तक सीमित रहा है, जिससे उनके निष्कर्षों की व्यापकता पर सीमाएँ लगती हैं। यद्यपि लक्षित शोध भी महत्वपूर्ण है, लेकिन गुणात्मक अनुसंधान—विशेषतः फिनोमेनोलॉजिकल और हरमेन्युटिक पद्धतियाँ—विविध सामाजिक-आर्थिक पृष्ठभूमियों वाले प्रतिभागियों के जीवन अनुभवों की व्यापकता को बेहतर ढंग से पकड़ सकती हैं।

इस अध्ययन में दिल्ली-राष्ट्रीय राजधानी क्षेत्र (एनसीआर) के विभिन्न सामाजिक-आर्थिक वर्गों से प्रतिभागियों को शामिल किया गया, जिससे यह पता लगाने में मदद मिली कि अलग-अलग लोगों ने कोविड-१९ के दौरान संप्रेषण को कैसे अनुभव किया और उसकी प्रतिक्रिया कैसे दी। विविध और पर्याप्त आकार का गुणात्मक सैम्पल थीमैटिक

सैचुरेशन को सुनिश्चित करता है और यह निष्कर्षों की विश्वसनीयता बढ़ाता है, जबकि शोध की गुणात्मक प्रकृति के दार्शनिक ढांचे के भीतर ही बना रहता है।

इस विश्लेषण की गहन्ता इसके व्यवस्थित तुलनात्मक दृष्टिकोण में निहित है, जिसमें विपरीत पृष्ठभूमियों वाले प्रतिभागियों से प्राप्त थीम्स की तुलना और समेकन किया गया है। यह अध्ययन तीन प्रमुख विषयों के इर्द-गिर्द संप्रेषण की भूमिका को रेखांकित करता है:

1. **अनिश्चितता के बीच स्पष्टता का उजागर**
2. **प्रभावी संदेशों के माध्यम से बाधाओं का पार पाना**
3. **सामान्यता की ओर वापसी में सहायक संप्रेषण**

इस अध्ययन में डेटा और पद्धति दोनों स्तरों पर ट्रायंगुलेशन अपनाई गई, जिसमें विशेषज्ञों के साक्षात्कार और साहित्य की आलोचनात्मक समीक्षा शामिल थी। इन निष्कर्षों की तुलना एक अन्य राज्य, केरल से भी की गई, जहाँ लोगों और विशेषज्ञों दोनों के दृष्टिकोणों को एकीकृत किया गया।

इस शोध का उद्देश्य संप्रेषण की जटिलताओं को समझना है, जिसमें सहायक और अवरोधक दोनों कारक शामिल हैं—जैसे श्रोता की तैयारी का आकलन, पूर्व-योजना, और महामारी के संदर्भ को समझना।

अध्ययन को तीन मुख्य चरणों में विभाजित किया गया:

पहले चरण में एक अन्वेषणात्मक अध्ययन किया गया, जहाँ सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य संकट की स्थिति में संप्रेषण की भूमिका को इंडक्टिव (आविष्कारी) पद्धति से परिभाषित किया गया। दिल्ली-एनसीआर में रहने वाले लोगों के साथ अर्ध-संरचित, खुले साक्षात्कारों के माध्यम से उनके जीवन में संप्रेषण की भूमिका की व्याख्याएँ ली गईं। इन अनुभवों के आधार पर महामारी के विभिन्न चरणों के अनुरूप जनभावनाओं में आए परिवर्तनों को समझा गया और विशेषज्ञ साक्षात्कारों से उन्हें सत्यापित किया गया। साथ ही, केरल राज्य से प्राप्त द्वितीयक शोध ने भी इन चरणों के अस्तित्व की पुष्टि की।

यह अध्ययन संप्रेषण को उसके संदर्भ से अविभाज्य मानता है। यद्यपि कई प्रतिभागियों ने कोविड-१९ संप्रेषण को सकारात्मक और सहायक बताया, इसकी भूमिका सामाजिक-आर्थिक प्रोफाइल और महामारी के विभिन्न चरणों में जीवन परिस्थितियों के अनुसार भिन्न रही। जहाँ अन्य अध्ययन मुख्यतः उद्दीपनों की प्रतिक्रियाओं या लक्षित श्रोताओं

पर केंद्रित हैं, यह शोध महामारी के दौरान संप्रेषण की गतिशीलताओं की व्यापक व्याख्या करता है, जो लोगों के प्रत्यक्ष अनुभवों पर आधारित है।

अंततः, इस अध्ययन के निष्कर्ष कोविड-१९ महामारी की जटिलताओं को समझने में संप्रेषण की केंद्रीय भूमिका को उजागर करते हैं—प्रारंभिक प्रतिक्रिया प्रयासों से लेकर दीर्घकालिक लचीलापन निर्माण तक। यह अध्ययन भविष्य की संकट संप्रेषण रणनीतियों के लिए महत्वपूर्ण अंतर्दृष्टियाँ प्रदान करता है और नीतियों व क्रियान्वयन के लिए अनुशंसाएँ प्रस्तुत करता है—जैसे कलंक और भेदभाव से निपटना, विश्वास निर्माण, और समुदाय की लचीलापन क्षमता को मजबूत करना। ये सुझाव सरकार की भविष्य की संप्रेषण पहलों को अधिक प्रभावी बनाने में सहायक हो सकते हैं और जनस्वास्थ्य प्रतिक्रिया को मजबूती प्रदान कर सकते हैं।

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