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Assessing Government Press Releases as Mechanisms for Open Government, Transparency, and Citizen Participation: A Survey-Based Study in Panchkula

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Abstract

Government press releases are essential tools of government public communication that governments use to communicate information on policies, programmes and public welfare programmes. This study is an examination of the perceptions of citizens with respect to the role of government press release in the promotion of Open Government, transparency, dissemination of information and citizen participation in Panchkula, Haryana. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was performed which utilized a structured 20-item questionnaire on the five-point Likert scale to 125 respondents. The descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to analyse the data. The results show that citizens' attitudes towards government information released through press releases are largely positive, especially on the aspects of raising awareness, providing information about government and transparency of government operations. But this is not enough to achieve meaningful public engagement, as their ability to encourage citizens' engagement in their communities is still relatively weak.

Keywords: Transparency, Citizen Participation, Government Communication, Good Governance, Government Press Releases, Democratic Governance.

Introduction

Government communication can be described as the deliberate sharing of information from public institutions to citizens for the purposes of informing, engaging and developing relationships with them (Canel & Sanders, 2012; Liu & Horsley, 2007). In democratic societies, the ability of citizens to understand, criticize and act upon government action requires a non-peripheral, administrative role of communication – timely and credible public communication. (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Welch, Hinnant & Moon 2005). One of the oldest and most frequently-used tools of this communication is the government press release, which is the official record by which governments share policy, decision, programme and achievement information with the media and public (Liu & Horsley, 2007; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Since the last decade, government communication has faced a lot of expectations, especially in a world that is embracing the open government agenda. Open government is an approach that moves from information being a "discretionary resource" controlled by the state to information being a public good that is accessible, usable and participatory (Meijer Curtin, & Hillebrandt, 2012; Lee & Kwak, 2012). Transparency and minimizing information gaps between

government and citizens have thus become key measures of good governance (Hood, 2006; Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). The press release takes on new significance in this environment: it is a routine, but strategic, channel that can further or limit openness in the state depending on its accuracy, accessibility, clarity, and perceived credibility (Fairbanks et al., 2007; Welch et al., 2005). With the diffusion of digital and social media, the ways press releases are created and shared have also changed, moving beyond the traditional boundaries of print and broadcast media and allowing for more direct information sharing between government and citizens (Bertot et al., 2010; Lee & Kwak, 2012). However, the more it reaches, the more open it is not necessarily, and the more it is used by citizens, the more communicative value it has (Arnstein, 1969; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Liu & Horsley, 2007). In this context, the current study explores citizens' perceptions of the government's press releases and assesses how effective these are in fostering awareness, effective dissemination of information, transparency and citizens' engagement in governance.

Literature Review

A literature review is a systematic description of the current state of knowledge regarding a topic, which helps to identify what is known, what is lacking, and places a new study in the broader context of an existing scholarly discourse (Snyder, 2019). The research literature is unanimous in its opinion that the communication between citizens and governmental institutions is a key element in democratic government. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), effective public communication creates mutual understanding between government and citizens, thus enhancing public participation and trust in government, and press releases serve as a public-relations tool for consistent, credible and direct communication with the public (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Liu & Horsley, 2007). The idea of open government emerged as a more salient one in response to the increased focus on transparency and accountability and the citizen's role in the administration of the public sector. According to Meijer et al. (2012) open government aims to make the government more transparent and accessible, so that people can have a more active role in decision-making. Transparency, in turn, is considered to be a key component of good governance: Hood (2006) defines it as the openness of information regarding government activities and decisions which enables citizens to assess the government's performance and to hold government authorities to account (Meijer et al., 2012), and Bertot et al. (2010) suggest that the provision of government information can enhance transparency and reduce information asymmetry. Citizen participation is an additional aspect of open government. Beyond disseminating information, Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizen participation" highlights the need to engage citizens, and Nabatchi and Amsler (2014) demonstrate that engaged citizens have a greater likelihood of participating in governance activities (Arnstein, 1969; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Press releases are typically one-way communications, but they can be well-planned to provoke awareness and civic conversation. However, those in government public relations notice that the communication is typically one-way and information-giving, as opposed to dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Liu & Horsley, 2007). Good public relations in government should engage people, and allow them to participate and collaborate rather than be told (Fairbanks et al., 2007). Trust is closely involved in this process; Welch et al (2005) report that transparency and access to information enhances citizens' trust in government but selective or incomplete communication leads to scepticism. **Research gap:** While there is a wealth of literature on e-governance, digital government and government communication, empirical evidence focusing on government press releases as autonomous communication tools is limited.

Previous research has focused on institutional communication from the government websites, social media and digital participation, and the effectiveness of frequent official press releases has been given little academic attention. More importantly, there is hardly any empirical study to explore the perception of public press releases regarding government initiatives in the Indian scenario, especially at the district administration level. By focusing on Panchkula district, Haryana, the present study addresses this empirical and contextual gap while contributing evidence on how official press releases influence awareness, transparency, information dissemination, trust, and citizen participation.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the conceptual structure that grounds a study in established theory and guides the interpretation of its findings (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The study is primarily based on the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which posits that salience of issues is given to them through mass-mediated messages, which help to shape public awareness. In this conception, government press releases are agenda-setting artefacts, since their content is chosen and shaped to create a different picture of governance for citizens, and in so doing, they form part of the agenda-setting process. This directly relates to the concern of the study on awareness and information dissemination (Objectives 1 and 2). The open-government, transparency point of view (Meijer et al., 2012; Hood, 2006) complements the agenda-setting lens since it views easy access to official information as an important precondition for accountability, and the open-government and transparency perspective complements Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, which extends beyond providing information to giving citizen a real say in decision-making. Both of these perspectives guide the study's implicit assumptions that press release can promote transparency and awareness easily (Objective 3) but will have a more restricted impact on substantive participation (Objective 4), as it is a one-way communication mode.

Objectives of the Study

Guided by the framework above, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine citizens' awareness of government press releases.
2. To assess the effectiveness of government press releases in disseminating government information.
3. To evaluate the role of government press releases in promoting transparency and open government.
4. To analyse the influence of government press releases on citizen participation in governance processes.

Research Questions

Guided by the objectives above, the study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent are citizens of Panchkula aware of government press releases?
- RQ2: How effectively do government press releases disseminate information to citizens?
- RQ3: How do citizens perceive the role of government press releases in promoting transparency and open government?
- RQ4: What influence do government press releases have on citizen participation in governance processes?

Hypotheses

Based on the objectives and research questions above, the study proposes the following hypotheses, stated as probable outcomes for each objective:

- H1: Citizens of Panchkula will report a moderate-to-high level of awareness of government press releases.
- H2: Government press releases will be perceived by citizens as a moderately effective channel for disseminating information about policies and schemes.
- H3: Government press releases will be perceived as contributing positively to transparency and open government.
- H4: Government press releases will have a comparatively limited influence on active citizen participation in governance processes.
- H5: There will be no statistically significant differences in citizens' perceptions of government press releases across gender, age, educational, or occupational groups.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant both academically and practically. From an academic perspective, it adds to the scant literature that has focused on specific government press releases as tools for open government and citizen participation, as opposed to government websites or social media channels in general (Canel & Sanders, 2012; Bertot et al., 2010). The study empirically tests citizens' perceptions in four dimensions of governance that are relevant to the open-government and transparency literature (Meijer et al., 2012), but have been neglected in the context of communication and geographic location. In practice, the results of this work could guide the PIO and district administration in Panchkula, as well as in similar municipal settings, to define and strengthen the different parts of the press release communication process, especially the participatory aspect to transform government communication from informational to a dialogic and participatory process. The study is thus relevant to communication scholars, public administrators, and policy makers involved in augmenting open and accountable governance. The study adds methodologically to existing research by its operationalization of the government press release to measurable constructs of awareness, dissemination, transparency, participation, and trust to create a framework that may be replicated or adapted in further research on government communication.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the systematic and coherent framework for collecting, analyzing and interpreting data to solve a research problem (Kothari, 2004). The study was of quantitative, descriptive, cross sectional survey design appropriate for evaluating citizens' perceptions of a population at a given time and across a defined population (Kothari, 2004; Creswell, 2014).

Population and sample. The target population was adult citizens of Panchkula district, Haryana. A purposive sampling method was used to select 125 respondents across different gender, age, educational and occupational groups (Etikan et al., 2016).

Sampling: In this research, purposive sampling technique was used where the respondents were purposefully selected taking into consideration the representation of different gender, age, education and occupation groups and having willingness to participate from the area of Panchkula district. The number of 125 respondents was deemed sufficient for this exploratory, descriptive cross-sectional survey, similar to numbers used in other government-communication studies. The sampling method used was purposive sampling as the sampling frame of all citizens of the adult population in Panchkula was not available and the main thrust of the study was to access the respondents who had

received the government press releases and could give meaningful responses to the questionnaire framed on the basis of the press release (Kothari, 2004).

Reference Period. All 125 respondents were asked to complete the survey in one continuous data collection window, thus providing a snapshot of the perceptions citizens have at a similar time as government issues press releases. As the study aimed to obtain a descriptive picture of the perceptions of the citizens at the present time, a single period cross-sectional design was selected rather than a longitudinal design (Kothari, 2004).

Unit of Analysis. The initial title is not directly relevant to the present study, but rather to content-analysis research designs. In this case, the unit of analysis is the individual respondent; his/her own self-report of the content of government press releases, based on the structured questionnaire, forms the main data analyzed.

Instrument. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data, which comprised a demographic section and 20 perception statements that were rated on a five point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The statements were grouped across five dimensions, each consisting of four items, corresponding to the objectives: awareness of press releases (items 1-4), effectiveness of information dissemination (items 5-8), transparency and open government (items 9-12), citizen participation (items 13-16) and trust and government–public communication (items 17-20). Future administrations should establish internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha before wider implementation of the instrument. Furthermore, the instrument employed a five-point Likert scale, which is widely recognised as an appropriate approach for measuring perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions in social science research because it allows respondents to express varying degrees of agreement while facilitating reliable statistical analysis (DeVellis, 2017; Joshi et al., 2015).

Data analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used for the analysis of responses, while one-sample t-tests were used to test differences from the midpoint of the scale (3.0), independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used for demographic comparisons, and Pearson product–moment correlations were used to examine the relationships among the composite dimensions and multiple linear regression was used to predict citizen participation. Every analyses were carried out in Python using packages pandas and SciPy at significance level $\alpha = .05$ (Field, 2018).

Tools. The data was collected by using the above-mentioned structured questionnaire and was coded and organised in a spreadsheet program before analysis. As mentioned above in the Data Analysis section, all the statistical computations were performed in Python and the following statistical tests were applied using the SciPy library: descriptive statistics, one-sample and independent-samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation and multiple regression.

Analysis Results and Discussion

This section reports the demographic profile of respondents and the results for each objective individually, discussing the results in the context of the theory and previous research. Before presenting inferential analyses, descriptive statistics were examined to understand respondents' overall perceptions regarding government press releases. Composite scores were computed for each construct by averaging the responses to their respective questionnaire items. Higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement with positive statements regarding government press releases. Inferential

statistical tests were subsequently employed to determine whether these perceptions differed significantly from the neutral midpoint and across demographic groups.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (N = 125)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	42	33.6%
	Female	41	32.8%
	Other	42	33.6%
Age group	18-25	23	18.4%
	26-35	34	27.2%
	36-45	21	16.8%
	46-55	22	17.6%
	Above 55	25	20%
Education	School	25	20%
	Graduate	31	24.8%
	Postgraduate	24	19.2%
	Doctorate	23	18.4%
	Other	22	17.6%
Occupation	Student	26	20.8%
	Government Employee	35	28%
	Private Employee	22	17.6%
	Business/Self-employed	23	18.4%
	Other	19	15.2%

Table no.1 shows that, distribution of the sample was fairly evenly split by gender (33.6% male, 32.8% female, 33.6% other), The age group with the largest numbers was 26–35 years (27.2%) and the largest group of graduates was 24–35 years. educational category (24.8%). The largest occupational group was government employees. (28.0%), followed by students (20.8%). The demographic distributions are shown in Figures 1–4.

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender (N = 125).

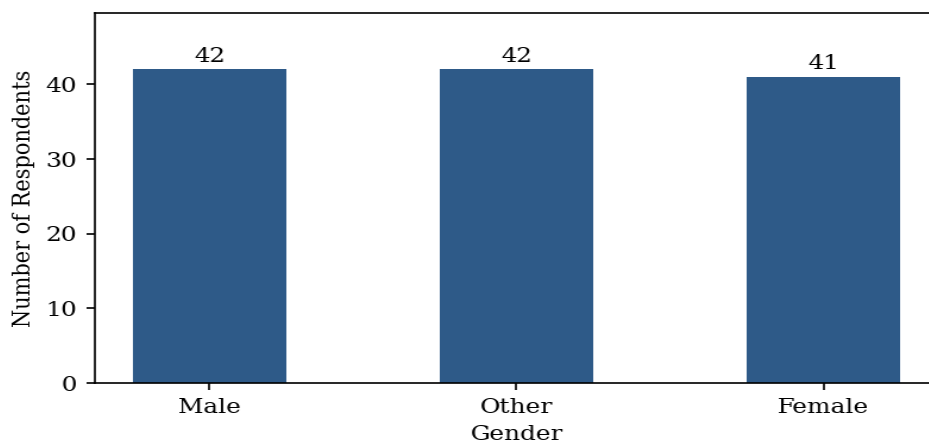


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by age group (N = 125).

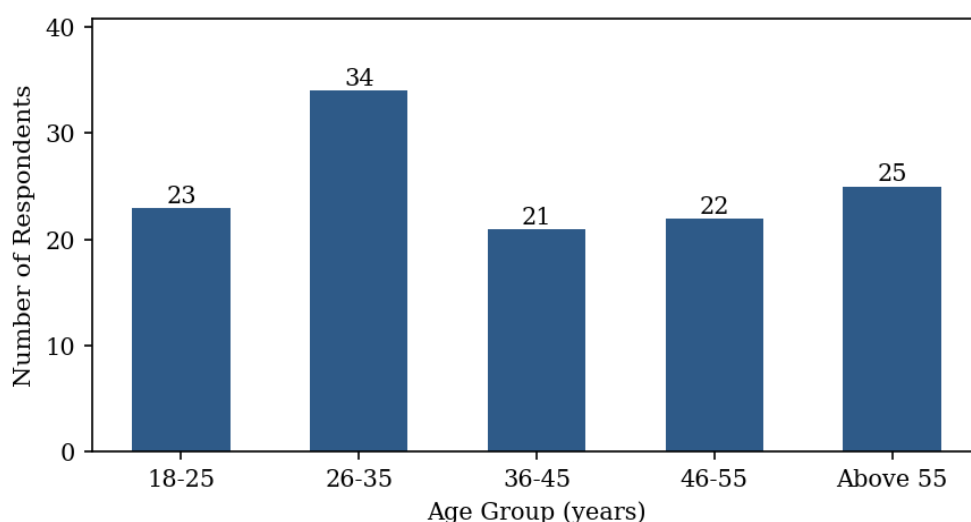


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by educational qualification (N = 125).

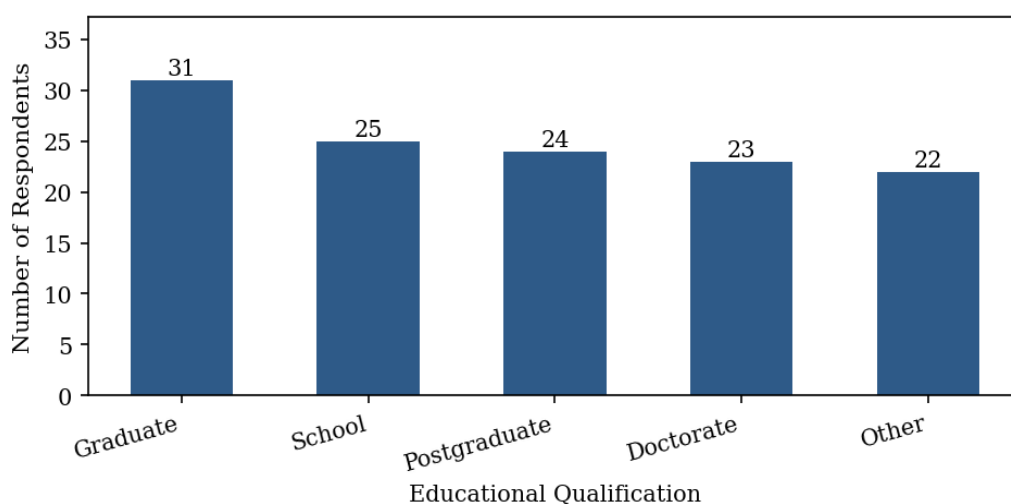
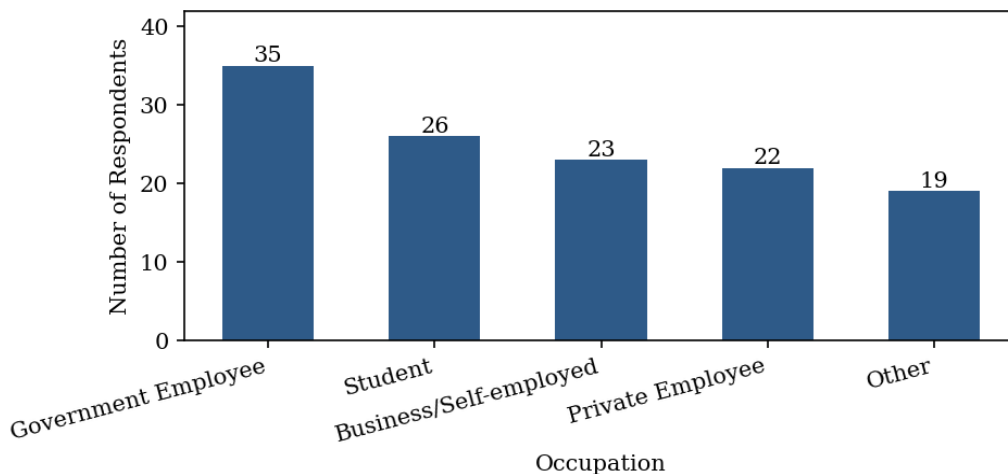


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by occupation (N = 125).



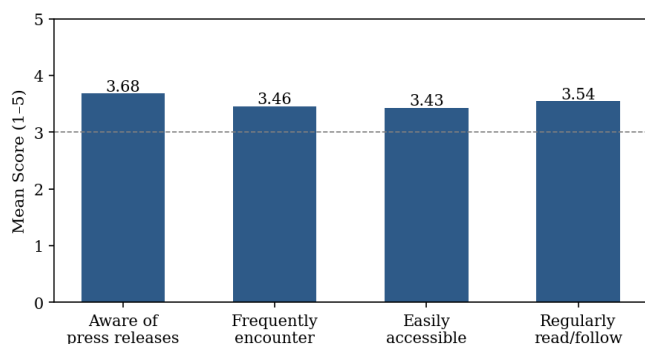
Objective 1: Citizens' Awareness of Government Press Releases

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for awareness items (N = 125)

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Aware of press releases issued by the Panchkula administration	3.68	1.22	58.4%	27.2%	14.4%
Frequently come across press releases via media	3.46	1.18	56%	22.4%	21.6%
Press releases are easily accessible to the public	3.43	1.33	56%	17.6%	26.4%
Regularly read or follow press releases	3.54	1.26	56.8%	23.2%	20%

Table no. 2 illustrates, the awareness level of citizens was moderately high (composite M = 3.53, SD = 0.63), well above the scale midpoint (t(124) = 9.42, p < .001). Majority (58.4%) said they had knowledge of press releases released by the Panchkula administration (M = 3.68) and 56.0% said that they have come across the press releases often (M = 3.46) via newspapers, television, websites and social media. The mean (M = 3.43) for the accessibility dimension was the lowest, with 26.4% disagreement, and a significant portion of the population still views it as challenging to access the official releases — a point made by Bertot et al. (2010) in their discussion of infrastructure for dissemination of transparency. The item means are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Mean scores for citizens' awareness of government press releases (scale 1–5; dashed line = midpoint).



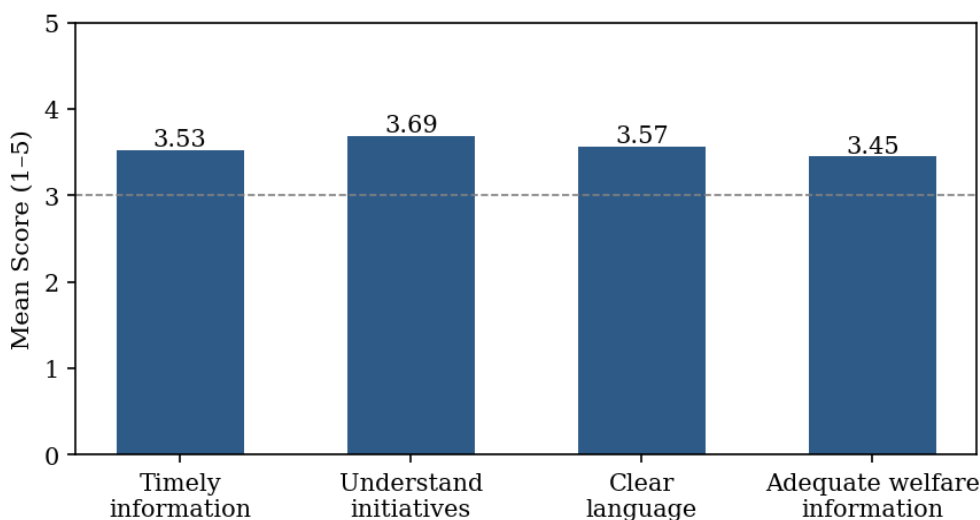
Objective 2: Effectiveness of Information Dissemination

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for information-dissemination items (N = 125)

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Provide timely information about schemes and policies	3.53	1.20	55.2%	24.8%	20%
Help me understand government initiatives in Panchkula	3.69	1.12	64.8%	17.6%	17.6%
Language is clear and easy to understand	3.57	1.14	58.4%	23.2%	18.4%
Provide adequate information about welfare programmes	3.45	1.23	55.2%	22.4%	22.4%

Table no. 3 shows, perception of the information channel of the press releases was considered reasonably effective (composite M = 3.56, SD = 0.54; $t(124) = 11.48, p < .001$). The most positive response was for understanding of local initiatives (M = 3.69, 64.8% agreed; in keeping with the agenda-setting hypothesis, that official messages help shape citizen's knowledge about governance (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Adequacy of welfare-programme information was the weakest item (M = 3.45), calling for increased depth of substantive content of the welfare programmes beyond the announcement. The item means are shown in figure 6.

Figure 6. Mean scores for effectiveness of information dissemination (scale 1–5; dashed line = midpoint).



Objective 3: Transparency and Open Government

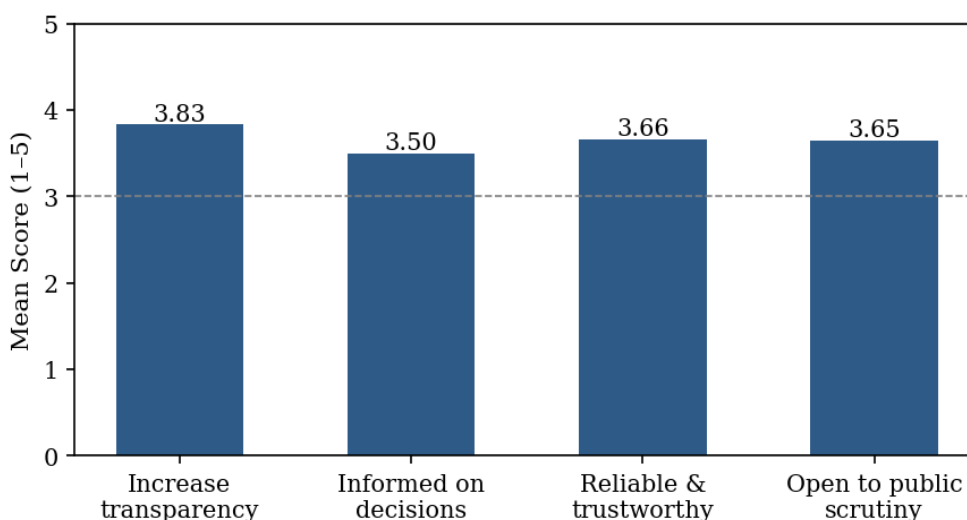
Table 4. Descriptive statistics for transparency and open-government items (N = 125)

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Increase transparency in government functioning	3.83	1.20	70.4%	11.2%	18.4%

Help citizens stay informed about administrative decisions	3.50	1.29	59.2%	14.4%	26.4%
Information is reliable and trustworthy	3.66	1.30	59.2%	22.4%	18.4%
Make government activities more open to public scrutiny	3.65	1.17	61.6%	21.6%	16.8%

Table no. 4 depicts that, transparency recorded the highest composite mean of all dimensions ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.60$; $t(124) = 12.19$, $p < .001$). Notably, 70.4% agreed that press releases contribute to the transparency of government functions ($M = 3.83$) and 61.6% agreed that it increases public awareness of government activities. These findings are consistent with the way Hood (2006) conceptualizes transparency as the presence of evaluable official information and Meijer et al.'s (2012) argument about routine disclosure practices as the supports of open government. The item means are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Mean scores for transparency and open government (scale 1–5; dashed line = midpoint).



Objective 4: Influence on Citizen Participation

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for citizen-participation items ($N = 125$)

Statement	Mean	SD	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Encourage participation in government programmes	3.67	1.12	64.8%	19.2%	16%
Motivate engagement with local governance issues	3.53	1.17	60%	20.8%	19.2%
Encourage citizens to seek more information	3.54	1.23	56.8%	20.8%	22.4%
Help citizens provide feedback on policies	3.56	1.23	58.4%	20.8%	20.8%

Table no.5 represents, the perceived participation effects were positive at the descriptive level (composite M = 3.57, SD = 0.60; $t(124) = 10.61, p < .001$); 64.8% agreed that press releases help to promote participation in government programmes. But the inferential evidence modifies this view in significant ways as described below. The item means are shown in Figure 8 and the five composite dimensions are compared in Figure 9.

Figure 8. Mean scores for influence on citizen participation (scale 1–5; dashed line = midpoint).

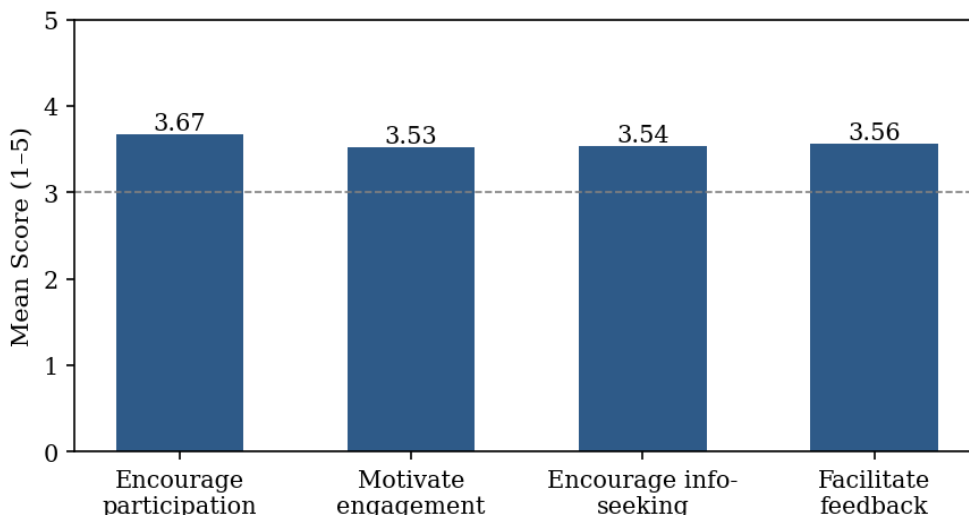
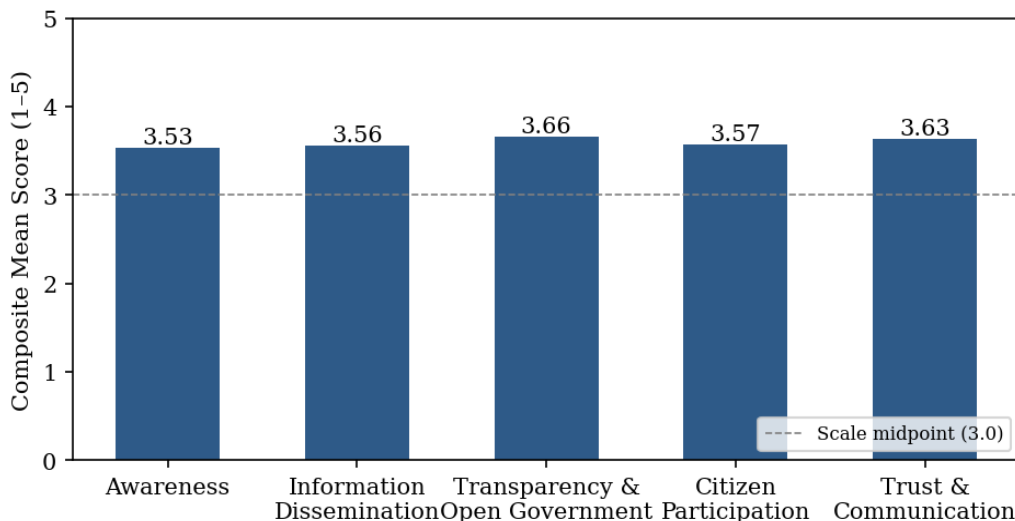


Figure 9. Composite mean scores across the five study dimensions (scale 1–5; dashed line = midpoint).



Relationships Among Dimensions and Demographic Comparisons

Table 6. One-sample t-tests of composite dimensions against the scale midpoint (3.0)

Dimension	Mean	SD	t(124)	p
Awareness	3.53	0.63	9.42	< .001
Information dissemination	3.56	0.54	11.48	< .001

Transparency & open government	3.66	0.60	12.19	< .001
Citizen participation	3.57	0.60	10.61	< .001
Trust & communication	3.63	0.55	12.82	< .001

Table no. 6 leads to, Discussion of Trust and Government Communication

Trust and Government Communication is not a separate research goal, but is an important aspect of the present study as trust increases citizens' inclination to accept government communication. The overall mean score (M = 3.63, SD = 0.55) was significantly above the neutral score ($t(124) = 12.82, p < .001$), suggesting that the respondents are generally aware that official government press releases are credible and trustworthy sources of information (Welch et al., 2005; Grimmelikhuisen, 2012). This finding supports the study by Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005) who found that transparency and access to government information can be a positive aspect for public confidence in government institutions. But, despite the relatively favorable perceptions of trust, the subsequent correlation analysis shows that there was only a weak association between trust and awareness, transparency, dissemination, and participation. This indicates that citizens may not break into the governance processes but can still be more trustful of government communication. Thus, although the government's press releases seem to be achieving some level of institutional legitimacy, other participatory means of communication are needed to transform that trust into meaningful civic involvement.

Table 7. Pearson correlations among composite dimensions (N = 125)

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5
1. Awareness	—				
2. Dissemination	.12	—			
3. Transparency	-.01	.20*	—		
4. Participation	-.07	-.00	.16	—	
5. Trust & communication	.09	.09	.04	.05	—

Note. * $p < .05$.

Table no. 7 portray that, only one correlation was significant: perceived effectiveness of information dissemination was positively, but weakly related to perceived transparency ($r = .20, p = .025$), in agreement with Bertot et al. 's (2010) hypothesis that dissemination quality is the foundation for transparency. The relationship between transparency and participation was positive but very weak and not quite significant ($r = .16, p = .071$) and awareness was essentially uncorrelated with participation ($r = -.07, p = .416$). The overall multiple regression predicting citizen participation from awareness, dissemination, and transparency was not significant, $F(3, 121) = 1.35, p = .262, R^2 = .03$, and was only near-significant for citizen transparency ($\beta = 0.17, p = .069$). That is, positive attitudes towards press releases as information and transparency tools do not necessarily correlate to positive attitudes towards participatory influence (a reflection of Arnstein's (1969) distinction between informing and true participation, and of the idea that government communication is largely one-way (Fairbanks et al., 2007; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Theoretical Interpretation of Findings

The overall findings strongly support the assumptions of Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which argues that repeated official communication shapes public awareness by increasing the salience of particular issues. The high scores for awareness and information dissemination suggest that government press releases are effective at carrying out this role, informing people about the government programmes and administrative decisions. Similarly, the high transparency scores lend credence to the Open Government view promulgated by Meijer et al. (2012), that the regular release of official information is beneficial to citizens' perceptions of openness and accountability. But the moderate correlation between transparency and citizen participation shows that this is not enough to facilitate democratic participation. The result mirrors the Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1969), which identifies informing citizens from enabling them to play an active role in decision-making. Likewise, Kent & Taylor's (2002) Dialogic Theory also argues that real public involvement is not about one-way dissemination but is two-way communication. The results thus suggest that government press releases are successful in performing informational and transparency roles but might need to be complemented with dialogic mechanisms, such as public consultation, interactive digital media, and structured feedback mechanisms, to enhance citizens' involvement in governance.

Table 8. *Independent-samples t-tests (male vs. female) on composite dimensions*

Dimension	Male M	Female M	t	p
Awareness	3.57	3.38	1.35	0.181
Dissemination	3.56	3.57	-0.12	0.908
Transparency	3.60	3.82	-1.64	0.105
Participation	3.67	3.53	0.98	0.328
Trust & communication	3.61	3.54	0.51	0.612

Table no.8 shows that, the independent-samples t-test results indicate that there were no statistically significant gender differences across any of the five composite dimensions ($p > .05$). Male and female respondents exhibited comparable levels of awareness, dissemination, transparency, participation, and trust and communication regarding government press releases.

Table 9. *One-way ANOVA of participation and transparency across demographic groups*

Factor	Participation F	p	Transparency F	p
Age group	0.64	0.632	2.14	0.080
Education	0.1	0.982	1.94	0.108
Occupation	1.09	0.365	1.38	0.245

Table no. 9 clearly states that, No statistically significant differences emerged across gender, age group, education, or occupation (all $p > .05$), indicating that perceptions of government press releases are broadly uniform across demographic segments of the Panchkula sample. This uniformity suggests that the strengths and weaknesses identified here — solid transparency credentials, weak participatory pull — are systemic features of the communication channel rather than artefacts of any particular audience group.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Evaluation

RQ1: To what extent are citizens of Panchkula aware of government press releases?

The results suggest that the awareness of citizens of Panchkula about government press releases is of medium level. The composite awareness score ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.63$) is significantly above the neutral point on the scale ($t(124) = 9.42$, $p < .001$), indicating that the majority of respondents are aware of government press releases and see them regularly via newspapers, television, government websites, and social media. Over half of those also said that they regularly read such releases, indicating that government press releases have become a regular source of official public information. Thus, the answer to RQ1 is that the citizens' awareness is not incidental or low, but moderate.

RQ2: How effectively do government press releases disseminate information to citizens?

The study shows that the respondents felt that government press releases, in general, are fairly effective tools for the dissemination of government information. The information dissemination dimension had a composite mean score of 3.56 ($SD = 0.54$) which was significantly higher than the midpoint ($t(124) = 11.48$, $p < .001$). Respondents strongly agreed that press releases enable them to learn about the government's initiatives and policies, while some less strongly agreed that the information are adequate for welfare programmes. Overall, the results suggest that official information is well communicated through government press releases, although there is room for improvement with the comprehensiveness of policy-related information. Thus, RQ2 is answered and it is concluded that press releases are effective tools of information dissemination.

RQ3: How do citizens perceive the role of government press releases in promoting transparency and open government?

The factor that showed the highest score in the study was transparency. The composite mean score ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.60$) was the highest of all scores, and significantly higher than the scale mid-point ($t(124) = 12.19$, $p < .001$). Staggering majorities of respondents said government press releases help to promote transparency in government, and also that they are reliable, trustworthy and help the public to hold the government accountable for its activities. This indicates that there is a high degree of awareness that official press releases are important tools for fostering openness, accountability and transparent governance. In response to RQ3, it is concluded that citizens consider government press releases to be important factors of transparency and open government.

RQ4: What influence do government press releases have on citizen participation in governance processes?

While the perceptions of citizens in terms of participation were moderately positive at the descriptive level ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.60$), the interpretation of these perceptions is not so promising using inferential statistics. Only a limited correlation was found between transparency and participation ($r = .16$, $p = .071$), and the multiple regression analysis indicated that awareness and information dissemination, combined with transparency, explained only 3% of the variance in citizen participation ($R^2 = .03$, $F(3,121) = 1.35$, $p = .262$). The results of these findings suggest that the government press release can not only inform the citizens but it also has a lower level of effectiveness to motivate the citizens to participate actively in civic actions or to participate in the process of governance. Based on this, RQ4 is answered in the affirmative by concluding that the government press releases have limited impact on substantive citizen participation, but an impact on the descriptive level.

Evaluation of Research Hypotheses

H1: Citizens of Panchkula will report a moderate-to-high level of awareness of government press releases.

Supported. The awareness dimension recorded a statistically significant composite mean ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.63$), significantly higher than the neutral midpoint ($t(124) = 9.42$, $p < .001$). These findings demonstrate that respondents possess a moderate-to-high level of awareness regarding government press releases, thereby supporting H1.

H2: Government press releases will be perceived by citizens as a moderately effective channel for disseminating information about policies and schemes.

Supported. Respondents positively evaluated the effectiveness of government press releases in disseminating information ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.54$), with the composite mean significantly exceeding the scale midpoint ($t(124) = 11.48$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H2 is supported.

H3: Government press releases will be perceived as contributing positively to transparency and open government.

Supported. Transparency and open government received the highest composite mean among all study dimensions ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.60$), with highly significant statistical support ($t(124) = 12.19$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that respondents strongly associate government press releases with improved transparency and openness in governance. Hence, H3 is supported.

H4: Government press releases will have a comparatively limited influence on active citizen participation in governance processes.

Supported. Although descriptive responses suggested generally positive perceptions regarding participation, inferential analyses demonstrated only weak relationships between participation and other study variables. Multiple regression analysis was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .03$, $p = .262$), indicating that government press releases have limited influence on encouraging meaningful citizen participation. Therefore, H4 is supported.

H5: There will be no statistically significant differences in citizens' perceptions of government press releases across gender, age, educational, or occupational groups.

Supported. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences across gender, age group, educational qualification, or occupation (all $p > .05$). These findings indicate that perceptions of government press releases remain broadly consistent across different demographic groups, thereby supporting H5.

Overall Interpretation of the Research Questions and Hypotheses

All of this together suggests that government press releases are effective in doing the things that they are supposed to do – increase public awareness, provide information, and improve perceptions of transparency. But their power to inspire positive participation in the civic life is relatively low. The findings in the study thus confirm all the five hypotheses, and show that government press releases could be more effective as instruments of information and transparency than as participative governance tools. The distinction underscores the need for complementary two-way communication strategies if governments want to create engaged citizens who are informed.

Terminology and Glossary

The following key constructs, drawn from the objectives and theoretical framework above, are defined here to clarify their use in the present study.

- Government Press Release: An official statement or record issued by a government department or authority to communicate policy decisions, programmes, or achievements to the media and the public (Canel & Sanders, 2012).
- Open Government: An approach to governance in which official information is treated as an accessible, usable, and participatory public good rather than a discretionary resource controlled by the state (Meijer Curtin, & Hillebrandt, 2012).
- Transparency: The openness of information regarding government activities and decisions, such that citizens are able to assess government performance and hold authorities to account (Hood, 2006).
- Citizen Participation: The involvement of citizens in governance processes at levels ranging from being informed to exercising genuine influence over decisions, as distinguished in Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.
- Trust in Government: Citizens' confidence in the reliability, credibility, and accountability of government communication and institutions, which is enhanced by transparent and accessible information and diminished by selective or incomplete communication (Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are the boundary conditions which qualify the interpretation and generalisability of research findings (Kothari, 2004). The study, first, was done on purposive sampling within a single district and thus cannot be generalized to the other districts. Secondly, the data is self-reported perceptions at one time. Third, the composite-level inferential results in this administration of the instrument should be interpreted with caution because the internal-consistency reliability of composite scales was low, and correlations among the dimensions were weak; composite-level results should be interpreted with caution, and item analysis and factor analysis validation of the scale dimensions are suggested for future administrations of the instrument. Finally, because the study relies exclusively on quantitative survey data, it does not capture the deeper motivations, experiences, or contextual factors influencing citizens' perceptions. Future research may therefore

adopt mixed-method or qualitative approaches to provide richer explanations of citizen-government communication.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the citizens perception about government press release as a tool for open government, transparency and citizens participation in Panchkula. They generally found the value of press releases positive on all dimensions, with transparency being the highest (M = 3.66; 70.4% agree that press releases help improve transparency in government functioning) and all composites being significantly greater than the midpoint on the scale. However, the inferential results show good evidence of asymmetry: perceived dissemination quality was significantly related to perceived transparency, but neither awareness nor dissemination, nor transparency meaningfully predicted perceived participation. Thus, the press releases in Panchkula could be seen as effective tools of disclosure and awareness, the steps in the informational ladder by Arnstein (1969); however, the participative potential is underutilised. The findings suggest that while press releases are a valuable tool for achieving transparency, they should be complemented with dialogic and interactive mechanisms, such as feedback channels, social media engagement, and public consultations, to ensure that the positive effects of transparency are translated into real citizen participation, which helps to promote the wider aims of open and accountable governance (Meijer et al., 2012; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Integration of Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study was able to meet all the four research questions and empirically tested the five hypothesized research questions. The results showed that the people of Panchkula have a medium to high level of awareness of government press releases (RQ1/H1) and view them as being effective in communicating information about government policies and welfare programmes (RQ2/H2). The respondents also also noted government press releases as tools that can foster transparency and open government (RQ3/H3), with transparency was also the most dominant dimension, as measured by the study. Despite reported positive perceptions from citizens about participation, inferential statistical analyses showed that the influence of government's press release on active participation in governance processes (RQ4/H4) is limited. Moreover, there was no statistically significant difference in these perceptions among the different groups of gender, age, education and occupation, which confirms H5, meaning the perceptions are not too different across these groups.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results from a theoretical standpoint support the Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) as it was found that the press releases of the government are effective agents in public awareness and salience of the issues. At the same time, the outcomes are in line with the principles of Open Government (Meijer et al., 2012) as they show the importance of regular official communication for citizens' impressions of transparency and accountability. The correlation between transparency and citizen engagement, however, is not strong, and supports Arnstein's (1969) argument that providing information is a first step in citizen involvement. Dialogic and interactive communication processes, in line with Kent and Taylor's (2002) dialogic communication approach, are necessary for authentic citizen engagement.

Policy Recommendations

The findings suggest that government departments should continue using press releases as reliable instruments of official communication while simultaneously strengthening their participatory potential. Public Information Offices should integrate press releases with interactive communication channels such as official social media platforms, digital feedback systems, public consultations, citizen grievance portals, and participatory outreach programmes. Such integration would enable government communication to move beyond one-way dissemination towards two-way engagement, thereby strengthening transparency, public trust, and democratic participation.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies should extend the present investigation by employing probability sampling techniques across multiple districts and states to improve generalisability. Longitudinal research designs could examine how citizens' perceptions change over time following major government initiatives or policy interventions. Researchers may also compare the effectiveness of government press releases with emerging digital communication platforms such as social media, official mobile applications, and citizen engagement portals. Finally, further psychometric validation of the measurement instrument through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, along with reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, is recommended to strengthen future empirical investigations in government communication research.

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