

DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE PAKISTAN



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**THE DEVELOPMENT
IMPERATIVE:**

MEDIA TO ENGAGE, EDUCATE, EMPOWER



DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE PAKISTAN

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Development Advocate Pakistan provides a platform for the exchange of ideas on key development issues and challenges in Pakistan. Focusing on a specific development theme in each edition, this quarterly publication fosters public discourse and presents varying perspectives from civil society, academia, government and development partners. The publication makes an explicit effort to include the voices of women and youth in the ongoing discourse. A combination of analysis and public opinion articles promote and inform debate on development ideas while presenting up-to-date information.



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The Role of Media in Development: Engagement, Education, Empowerment



By
Knut Ostby
Resident Representative
UNDP Pakistan

The word media, originating from the Latin ‘medius’, speaks to the quality of being ‘in between’. Thus, media implies the relaying of information between the source and the public, between the news itself and its eager audience.

Today, in many ways, the role of the audience is not as passive as it once was. The public participates in media, and even creates it, especially in the wake of social media and the popularity of online publishing platforms open to the public. In this way, communication through media has ceased to be top-down, and has shifted to include many more voices from the grassroots.

Pakistan is no different. Over the years, the country’s media landscape has evolved from overwhelmingly print-focused with a smattering of state-owned enterprises, to a diverse representation of different voices, regions, and opinions.

With wider penetration of TV over the past two decades, newspaper circulation has seen a steady decline. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the number of newspapers and periodicals in the country declined from 1039 in 2009, to 707 in 2019. Easy accessibility of internet over mobile has fostered internet penetration, which stood at 54 percent in 2021, increasing by 21 percent from 2020. Likewise, the number of social media users in Pakistan increased by nine million between 2020-2021, and stood at 71.70 million in January 2022.

How has this opening up of space impacted development – from the social

to the political?

The media in our modern world, serves multiple and changing functions. It acts as both a means of information as well as a tool of surveillance, a platform for free expression and a framework through which narratives can be fashioned, altered, and even discounted.

The media undeniably holds the power to trigger change in society, and shift public opinion over issues. This ‘citizen power’ has amplified, allowing the voice of the public to be represented in conversations on policy. In Pakistan, social media has taken the lead in this field – from organizing protests remotely to voicing dissent over proposed laws. The democratizing of media platforms has enabled greater focus on accountability, social development and economic justice.

Last year on World Press Freedom Day, the United National Secretary-General, António Guterres highlighted the “critical role of reliable, verified and universally accessible information in saving lives and building strong, resilient societies”.

This is important for Pakistan. While media models have certainly evolved over time, media narratives rest in the hands of a few media magnates: over half of the overall audiences in each of the four media – TV, radio, print and online – are concentrated in the hands of four owners or fewer. This can serve as a roadblock in enabling media to leverage impartial, reliable information for the benefit of the public.

In addition, a media ecosystem can only be called successful when it reflects the interests of all members of society. In Pakistan, however, inclusion – particularly for traditional media - is a persistent challenge. Basic access to media remains scattered: spotty access to cable TV persists in around 65 percent of the population and the approximately 40 percent of Pakistanis who cannot read or write also cannot benefit from print media. Moreover, vernacular media in Pakistan, while trying its best to sustain and highlight a provincial voice, is deteriorating with time owing to a lack of financial and infrastructural support. This has dire implications for development, with the threat of dominant voices crowding out the voices of those that are furthest behind.

Meanwhile, in order for media to play an effective role in identifying development issues, freedom of expression and safety of journalists is important. Unfortunately, Pakistan has a chequered history. In 2020, Pakistan's press freedom rank dropped from 142 in 2019,

to 145 out of 180 countries in 2020, in the Press Freedom Index. Between 1990-2020, 138 media persons lost their lives in the line of duty. Given, on average, every five days a journalist is killed globally, the high cost of practicing remains a global phenomenon. Nevertheless, with the passing of the Journalist Protection Act in 2021, a first for the country, much-needed development in safeguarding the rights and security of journalists in Pakistan seems to be underway.

At the same time, the media in Pakistan in addition to being a socio-political watchdog, has been particularly productive in the awareness and mitigation of natural disasters. The media rose to the role of an informant and facilitator during the 2005 Kashmir earthquake in Pakistan, the tsunami threat in 2014, and also the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The latter is a particularly significant example of the role of media for development. It came forth as the leading tool for mitigation awareness, disease surveillance, and

even telemedicine and distance learning initiatives.

As a patron of public trust, a pillar of democracy, a tool for transparency, and an agent of empowerment, the media can be the pull and push for helping achieve sustainable development in Pakistan. The three pillars of democracy – legislature, executive and judiciary – can better serve national interests if they can guarantee that the fourth pillar – the media – gets sufficient space to deliver on its promise.

For development to truly be sustainable, people must be allowed the space and place to fulfill their potential. Platforms for democratic discourse, shielded by transparent institutions and with a focus on inclusion, justice, and reliability, can help shape this enablement. In this sense, the media is a crucial tool to engage, educate, and empower the people of Pakistan towards a well-informed and pluralistic future.



“ The quality of democracy has direct relationship with press freedom. ”



© Tribune

© Saurabh Chatterjee

Development Policy Through the Media Lens

“ A free, independent, and credible media can close information gaps and empower people to choose logically in their capacity as a consumer in the market, and as a voter at the ballot box. ”



By

Afshan Subohi

Assistant Editor
Dawn Newspaper

If poverty, illiteracy, and religiosity did not stop the people of Pakistan from manifesting strong political instincts, the credit, at least in part, must go to the national media. Beating heavy odds, journalists in Pakistan go beyond the call of duty to keep people informed.

Media professionals could have still done better in terms of news dissemination had the state been more mindful of people's right to information, and the space of private media that was meant to satisfy that need.

On their part, the media ownership pattern has to take some blame in the overall scheme of things. The concentration of private media ownership among a handful of family-owned entities empowered media barons to abuse their position of power to promote their narrow interests at the cost of public, journalism and journalists. To suit their business interests, they seldom hesitate to compromise on key principles essential to the existence of a free media. They tend to oblige powerful interest groups in exchange for financial patronage to compensate partially for their flawed business models. They prefer collusion over competition, as confirmed by the findings of the Competition Commission of Pakistan. The role of development partners has also been weak in nudging the government to ditch strong-arm tactics to peddle the official narrative, and the media barons towards more efficient and inclusive business models.

A better-informed public would perhaps have defended their rights more effectively, sidelined irresponsible elements, and forced successive governments to utilize public resources judiciously in larger public interest, like improving social service delivery and the physical infrastructure. Drawing energy from pluralism and diversity, better informed people of Pakistan could have defended their rights more effectively.

Having said that, the romance of argumentative Pakistanis with democracy and current affairs could not have developed to the current level had the media of the country been compliant. Defying all odds, including threats to life and jobs, journalists in Pakistan have shown remarkable courage in exposing the



© Arif Mahmood/Dawn White Star

“ A strong, free, independent media is vital for democracy to grow roots in a country where institutions are weak, the economic framework elitist, and the patronage culture rife. ”

abuse of power, and telling stories of the weak and the vulnerable, all through the country’s history. With all its flaws and shortcomings, the media in Pakistan is regarded to be the most vibrant in the South Asian region.

At several junctures in the history of Pakistan, the state had to make amends under public pressure. Many factors must have been at play, but the unrelenting public pressure sent even the dreaded military dictators in the country, packing.

Ordinary Pakistanis citizens hold strong opinions on internal politics and global events. They like to debate over current affairs in groups. It is a popular pastime across all sorts of social divides. There are special words, like ‘kuchehry’ in Sindhi, for such sittings. The popularity of news channels bear testimony to the fact. Probably nowhere in the world, the public is addicted to political talk shows the way it is the case in Pakistan. No wonder, investors are betting on the news business. Besides financial gains, media ownership opens new doors to power corridors for patronage-seekers.

It goes without saying that the quality of democracy has direct relationship with press freedom. Strong, free, independent media is vital for democracy to grow roots in a country where institutions are weak, the economic framework elitist, and the patronage culture rife. It is, therefore, important to support and enable the journalists to identify corruption webs, report

exploitation and wastages, expose policy flaws, hold the authority accountable, and pave the path of sustainable development. The three pillars of democracy – legislature, executive and judiciary – can better serve the national cause if they can guarantee that the fourth pillar – the media – gets sufficient space to deliver on its potential and promise.

In the absence of accessible avenues of skill development, most journalists are self-trained. Except for a few TV anchors and favourites, journalists are amongst the worst paid white-collar workers in Pakistan. There is no standardization of pay scales across the sector. Even media magnets reputed to be the better paymasters use all possible tricks to underpay their workers. Despite strong presence in the market, media houses avoid listing like plague simply because it demands more transparency in corporate affairs. Typical Pakistani media owners are manipulative. They want special status for serving a social cause, and lean on the government for tax/duty breaks and a share in advertisement budget, but are unwilling to treat their workers the way they should.

Pakistan has seen relative improvement in physical infrastructure in the recent past, but it has a long way to go to improve its standing on social indices. Its track record on gender parity, health, and education leaves much to be desired. The country has, however, surprised even itself with its performance in dealing with the pandemic that rattled the world. It managed to



“ The media, if nudged to actively trace and track progress, can improve the country’s performance on the SDGs. ”

contain the loss to life and livelihood when many advanced nations took a harsh beating. The media actively supported the government’s efforts.

Media also consistently highlights contradictions and lapses in economic policies. It reports the irony of the dole-outs to the asset-owning segments at the cost of impoverished masses.

For example, the current ruling clique is boasting of five percent growth, but stories in the national media suggest the masses are excluded from all potential benefits that only end up lining the deep pockets of the barons, the brokers and the bankers in a country where the pandemic has pushed millions more below the poverty line. The current political mayhem is also a manifestation of the growing public discontent over escalating economic pressure. The current spike in the crime rate is also linked to the level of rising income disparity in the country.

Among other factors, the performance of Pakistan on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depends on the level of public awareness and public pressure to deliver on the promise. The media, if nudged to actively to trace and track progress, can improve the performance. Some media organizations did special series to highlight the current situation against each of the 17 SDG goals, but it is far from sufficient, as halfway through the 15-year period, many of the legislators are found to

be ignorant of the SDGs that call for action to end poverty, protect the planet, and to ensure that by 2030, peace and prosperity is shared by all.

The dissection of the poor performance of Pakistan on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000-2015 showed that even the best development plans prove useless without public ownership and pressure. Pakistan’s was among the first few countries to draw an exemplary actionable plan of MDGs at the turn of the century, but the country still fell short on all eight goals.

Again, in 2015, soon after adoption, the SDGs were integrated into economic policy frameworks. The pace of progress on the SDGs so far, has impressed none.

The argumentative souls that Pakistanis are, they have a great appetite for information. It would be logical to assume that better-informed public, passionate to defend and extend freedoms, and desperate for a better dignified life, can mount enough pressure to force the authorities into some level of course correction.

A free, independent and credible media can close information gaps and empower people to choose logically in their capacity as a consumer in the market, and as a voter at the ballot box.



Printing Press

Empowered Media for Development

“ Media in Pakistan is fully empowered and free. ”

By **Chaudhry Fawad Hussain**

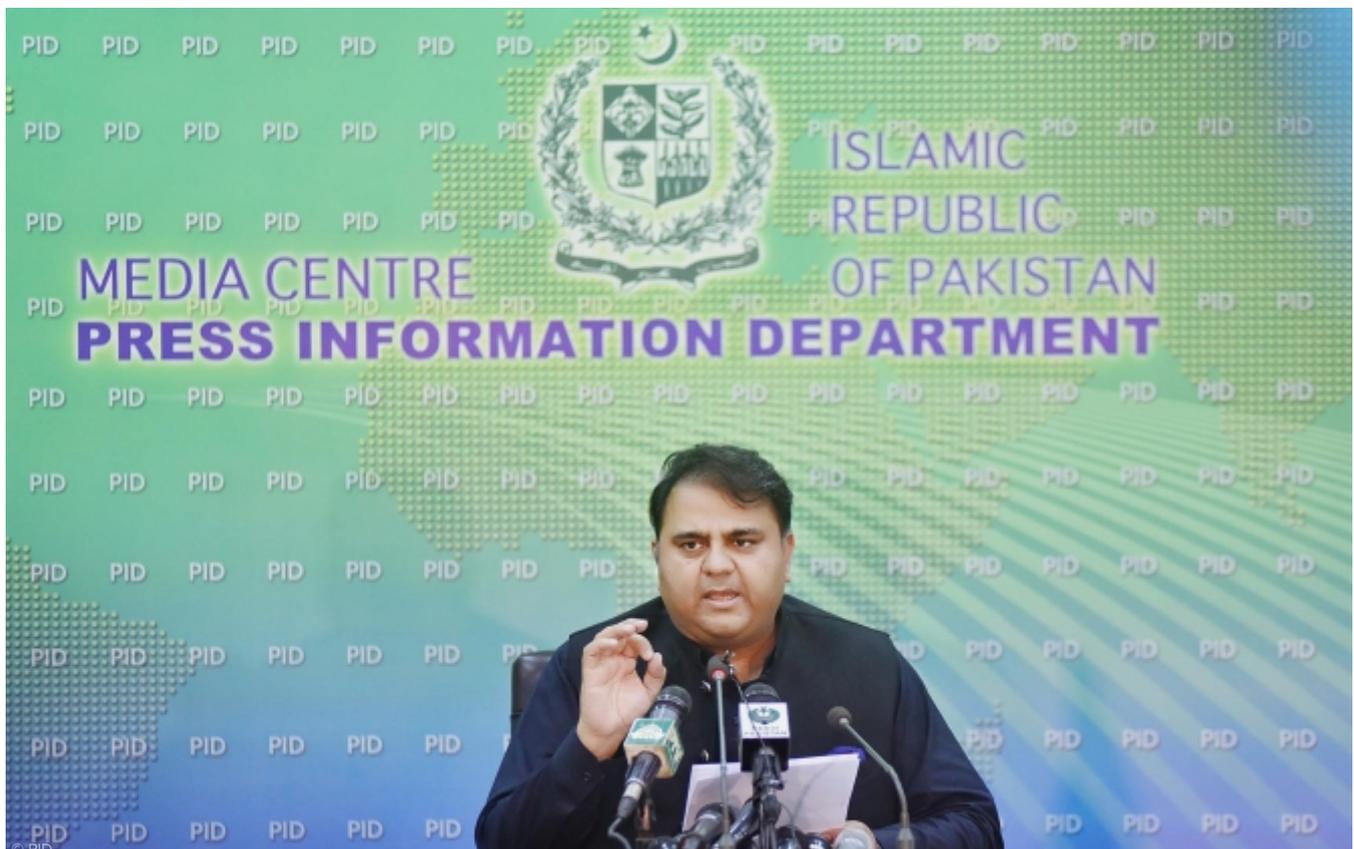
Federal Minister, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

Media coverage has an important role to play in socio-economic development and sustainable development policy issues.

The media has evolved rapidly in the recent past and has been playing a key role in the projection of economic issues in the country.

As an important pillar of the state, the role of media during emergencies has been crucial. Likewise, with the quick spread of news, the media is also vital for regional stability.

Media has also worked to raise voice for the participation of marginalized segments of the society in the development process, along with empowerment of weaker segments of the society. Media in Pakistan is fully empowered and free. Employment opportunities in the media have squeezed after its digitization, but demand for youth having knowledge of modern technologies, has increased.



Honourable Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Chaudhry Fawad Hussain briefing media in Islamabad on 13-9-18

Battling COVID-19: The Media Warrior

The media played a key role as an informant and tracker during COVID-19. This infographic presents an overall picture of how the media worked as a crises mitigator, and the various tools it employed to alleviate the challenge.

Reach of Media¹



RADIO

Less than 10% of Pakistanis listen to radio



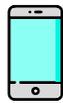
NEWSPAPER

15-20% of Pakistanis read a newspaper



SOCIAL MEDIA

25% of Pakistanis use social media



SMARTPHONE

25-30% of Pakistanis use a smartphone



TELEVISION

80% of Pakistanis watch TV



MOBILE PHONE

90% of Pakistanis use a mobile phone



Tools Employed



NEWSPAPERS



MAGAZINES



BROCHURES



PAMPHLETS



BANNERS



BOOKS



REPORTS

PRINT MEDIA



ELECTRONIC MEDIA



TELEVISION



RADIO



SOCIAL MEDIA



ONLINE BLOGS



PODCASTS



CHATBOTS



PHONES



WEBSITES

1. UNDP Pakistan (2020) "Innovative ringtone messages positively impacts knowledge, perceptions and behaviours related to COVID-19 in Pakistan." Available at: <https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/blog/2020/innovative-ringtone-messages-positively-impacts-knowledge-perce.html>

Area of Work

General Awareness

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS ALERT

A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a contagious disease common in different species of animals. It is transmitted from animals to human and then from human to human as well.

SYMPTOMS

- Fever
- Flu-like symptoms
- Cough
- Shortness of breath and breathing difficulties

PROTECT YOURSELF

- Threw tissues away and dispose of immediately after use
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue paper or mask
- Avoid consumption of raw and undercooked meat and eggs
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water

If you suffer from cold or runny nose, avoid going to office, school or in a crowded place and avoid close contact with other people.

If you suffer from any of these symptoms visit your nearest health centre.

For more information visit your nearest Aga Khan Health Centre

COVID-19

اگر کوئی نیا بیماری ہے تو اسے COVID-19 کہتے ہیں۔

Prevention and Protection

SYMPTOMS

- 42°C
- 100°F
- 100.4°F

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wear a mask in public places
- Stay at home if you are sick

Seasonal Flu (موسمی فلو)

موسمی فلو ایک عام بیماری ہے جو ہر سال ہمارے ممالک میں لگتی ہے۔ اس سے بچنے کے لیے ہمیں کچھ احتیاطی تدابیر اختیار کرنی چاہئیں۔

- ہاتھ دھو کر اور ماسک پہن کر
- کھانسی اور کھانسی کے وقت اپنے منہ اور ناک کو تھام لیں
- اپنے ہاتھوں کو صابن سے دھو کر
- فلیکس سے بچنے کے لیے
- فلیکس سے بچنے کے لیے

For more information visit your nearest health centre

REOPEN YOUR WORKPLACE WITH RESPONSIBILITY

Let's re-open our industry responsibly. To ensure safety of our work force during this epidemic, the Government of Pakistan has developed a comprehensive list of SOPs which will enable corporate offices and industrial units to operate in a risk-free environment. This is the time in which we should act responsibly and follow safety protocols at work with extreme care and perfection.

- Attendance** Stop using biometric attendance
- Temperature Check** Regularly Thermal Screening Entry-point
- Disinfect** Workplaces, entrance of vehicles and vehicles of management staff before double-entry/entry
- Encourage virtual practices** Minimize contact among workers and customers using virtual communication
- Maintain Safe Distance at Work** Maintain at least 1 meter distance during work in any other activity requiring interpersonal communication.
- Use gloves, masks and safety glasses** Repair responsible for delivery should wear hand gloves and face shield
- Wash hands Regularly/Use Hand Sanitizers** Hand sanitizers to be placed at entry and exit points
- Wash hands before/after the work**
- Split Shifts/Shifted Entry Shifts** Split shifts to workers into morning and evening and limit work up to 6hrs in 12 working hours
- Observe COVID-19 symptoms** Public workers at the construction site with COVID-19 symptoms
- Pick and Drop Protocols** Make transportation arrangements which maintain social distance among workers

NOTE: Failing to comply with safety protocols may lead to heavy fines, penalties and shutting down of operations.

ماسک کا استعمال

ماسک صرف مندرجہ ذیل لوگوں کو پہننا چاہیے

- جو کرونا وائرس انفیکشن کا شکار ہیں
- جو کرونا وائرس میں مبتلا مریضوں کی دیکھ بھال کرتے ہیں (مثالیتو ورکرز)
- جو عام نوعیت کے نزلہ زکام اور فلو کا شکار ہیں

N95 ماسک

ایک سپیشل ماسک ہے اور صرف ان لوگوں کو استعمال کرنا چاہیے جو کرونا وائرس کی مریضوں کی دیکھ بھال کرتے ہیں۔

1166 corona.info@nhrc.gov.pk

UNODC COVID-19 RESPONSE

پولیس اور دیگر قانون نافذ کرنے والے اداروں کے اہلکاروں کے لئے آگاہی پیغام

- رہزداروں کا مشاہدہ: کوئی بھی شخص یا گاڑی کو دیکھ کر پتہ چلے کہ وہ کون سا علاقہ ہے اور وہ کس علاقہ سے آیا ہے۔
- مناقب نامہ لکھیں: کوئی بھی شخص یا گاڑی کو دیکھ کر پتہ چلے کہ وہ کون سا علاقہ ہے اور وہ کس علاقہ سے آیا ہے۔
- دیکھنے کا مشاہدہ: کوئی بھی شخص یا گاڑی کو دیکھ کر پتہ چلے کہ وہ کون سا علاقہ ہے اور وہ کس علاقہ سے آیا ہے۔
- پتہ چلے کہ وہ کون سا علاقہ ہے اور وہ کس علاقہ سے آیا ہے۔

#VaccinesWork For All

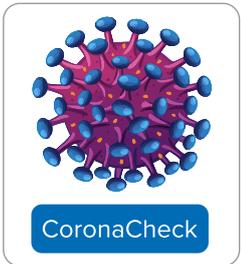
Expanded Program on Immunization Government of Pakistan

UNICEF for every child



Service Rendition

a. Telehealth



Mobile Application
launched by Aga Khan
University Hospital



Sehat Tahaffuz helpline 1166:
To provide health-related information
services to the people.



COVID-19 Telehealth Portal:
Connecting Doctors to the Public for
Free Consultations



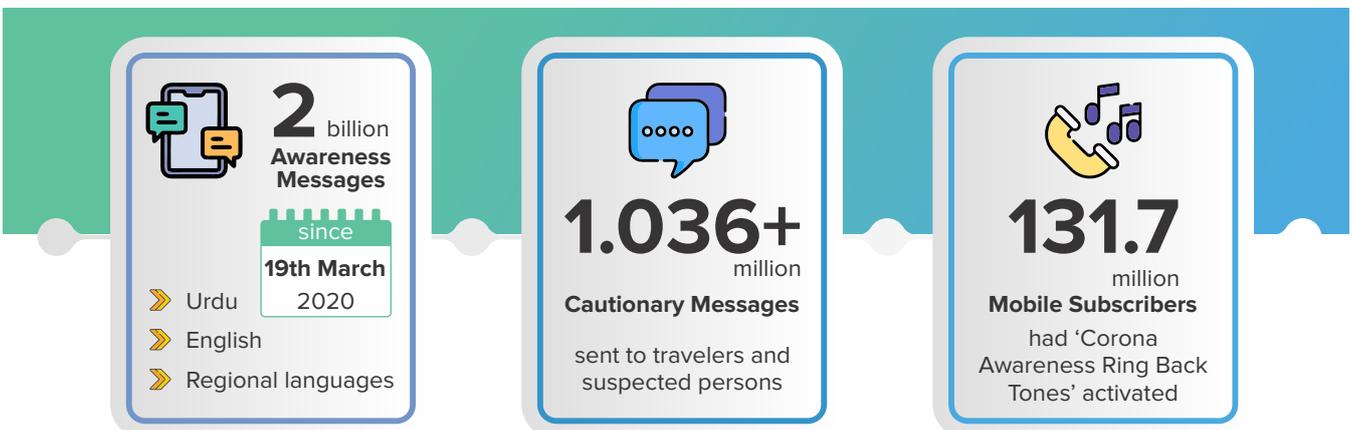
Medicine Delivery
Mobile Application and
Website

b. Distance Learning

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pakistan quickly deployed the federal program TeleSchool for Pakistani students, and the provincial program Taleem Ghar for students in Punjab.



c. Telecom Messaging²



2. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, "PTA continues to support efforts to contain COVID-19." Read more at: <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/media-center/single-media/pta-continues-to-support-efforts-to-contain-covid-19-260321>

Telecom operators:

- increased data allowances
- Offered discounted bundles & packages
- Quickly expanded the network to remote areas

To facilitate operations of educational institutions, and businesses:

- 745 IPs** have been whitelisted
- 2968** Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) have been registered
- 16 different short codes** and **6 UAN** numbers working round the clock

To increase awareness about 'Prime Minister's COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Fund-2020'

- 164.08 million** SMS sent for urging donations
- Short code **6677** allocated for funds collection

teleschool

PTA raised awareness for TeleSchool through

239 million General SMS

240 million Precautionary Measures SMS

Ehsaas

E H S A A S

سے پاکستان کا غریب دوست پروگرام

Ehsaas Programme registration made free through SMSs to 8171

Tracking & Surveillance

National COVID-19 Statistics Database

Pakistan Cases Details

Government of Pakistan

Official Portal: www.covid-19.gov.pk

Confirmed Cases: 1,519,627

Active Cases: 18,026

Deaths: 30,313

Recoveries: 1,471,288

COVID-19 Dashboard

Health Resource Mapping Portal

Hospitals

12,525 Front Doctors

29,510 Paramedics

3,900 Total Hospitals

639 COVID Hospitals

3,459 COVID updated in portal

COVID Hospitals

639

Violation Reporting Hotline

Report SOPs Violation

03353336262

Real-Time Hospital Visibility Application

Tracking Violations & Complaints

Are you a healthcare worker with a complaint?

Whatsapp Us

+92300 1111166

Call the Helpline

1166

A representative will get in touch with you shortly

WHO COVID-19 Updates for Pakistan

cases of COVID-19 with **30,333** deaths, reported to WHO. As of 16 March 2022, a total of **226,203,862** vaccine doses have been administered.

Pakistan Situation

1,522,862 confirmed cases

30,333 deaths

Portal on National repository for all COVID related data & forms the basis for advance data analytics for disease projections and identification of smart lockdowns.

IDIMS

Integrated Disease Information Management System



“ Public trust in the media eroded even as it became more combative and partisan. ”

Ethics, Civics and Agency

“ There is no better time than now for news organizations to unite and collectively fight for the right to freedom of speech. ”



By

Naziha Syed Ali

Assistant Editor
Dawn Newspaper

“The press was to serve the governed, not the governors.” This observation in the landmark Pentagon Papers case brought by the New York Times against the U.S. government in 1971, holds true for news media everywhere. However, for a host of reasons that have much to do with the lack of real democracy in the country, the impunity of certain powerful actors and the corporatization of the news, journalists in Pakistan have not always been watchdogs for the public interest. Sections of the news media have been co-opted by the power elite — elected or otherwise — that expects the press to act in furtherance of their agendas. The resultant disunity within the media landscape has made it more vulnerable to manipulation for political ends.

What constitutes ethical journalism in this milieu? Pressures on the media are nothing new. During the military dictatorships of General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul-Haq, journalists were directly in the line of fire. The repressive ‘press advice’ system under Gen Zia during the ‘80s, not to mention the daily vetting of the entire content of newspapers before printing, sucked the life and soul out of news gathering. Some sections of the press, though, tried innovative ways to register their defiance, such as leaving blank spaces on the pages of their newspaper where a censored story was to have appeared.

The burgeoning of cable television channels was a watershed moment. While the media appeared free as never

before, ‘handling’ it acquired even more importance and urgency in the eyes of the state. Violence against journalists covering corruption or ‘sensitive’ political stories markedly increased. Competition among media outlets for a slice of the advertising pie made the cost of not toeing the line prohibitive.

As a result, coverage of the news itself underwent a shift, becoming much more agenda-driven, reductive and prone to excess. TV talk shows evolved into a platform for theatrics rather than edifying discussion, with the hosts themselves often guilty of provoking their guests into ugly confrontations to drive up ratings. Public trust in the media eroded even as it became more combative and partisan.

The war against terrorism proved another challenge. What constitutes ethical coverage versus sensationalism or irresponsible reporting? The conflict also provided an opportunity for the state to hide behind the pretext of ‘national security’, particularly where it came to its actions in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the tribal agencies then known collectively as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The enactment of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 by the PML-N, further impeded reporting. Nevertheless, some journalists valiantly continued to do their duty to inform their audiences about human rights violations and policy failures, and ask inconvenient questions of hostile authorities. Vicious campaigns, shored up by social media



“ The burgeoning of cable television channels, was a watershed moment. While the media appeared free as never before, ‘handling’ it acquired even more importance and urgency in the eyes of the state. ”

trolls, were set in motion to discredit them; accusations of being ‘anti-state’ and ‘acting against the national interest’ began to be bandied about freely.

With the coming of the PTI government, both civilian and military leaderships appeared to be ‘on the same page’ where muzzling the media was concerned. Challenges to inhibit reporting increased through a mix of legislation and micromanaging coverage. Social media campaigns against independent-minded journalists also increased in severity. Whereas the ‘red lines’ earlier had been largely clear, they now became blurred and arbitrary.

Consider the following example: On March 4, 2022, a horrific act of terrorism shook Peshawar. The next day, Dawn carried the headline ‘Attack on Shia mosque kills 57’. By providing the information that it was a sectarian attack, it contextualized the tragedy in the

multidimensional terrorism threat that confronts Pakistan. A few hours later, the information minister denounced the paper for mentioning the denomination of the targeted mosque and asked if its editor sought to spread communal disharmony. The reaction was completely unwarranted, but it is typical of the effort to control and censor the media that is ongoing in Pakistan, and the minefield that journalists must navigate.

In its hubris, however, the state may have overplayed its hand. Pushed against the wall, the media has begun to fight back. A number of rulings by the superior courts have helped by underscoring the importance of an independent media to strengthen the democratic process. There is no better time than now for news organizations to unite and collectively fight for the right to freedom of speech.

“ Pushed against the wall, the media has begun to fight back. ”

Challenging Media Fundamentals: A Personal Account

“ As an agent of public trust, the responsibility of exposing vice and forgery rests with the media. ”



By

Hamid Mir

Journalist & Author

Journalists have encountered a multitude of roadblocks in their fight for freedom of expression. The use of ‘fear’ as a tool to control coverage has long been used. Likewise, the concept of ‘favouring’ journalists for implicit messaging, has also been growing in momentum. Working as a journalist without fear or favour, is becoming a big challenge.

As a journalist long involved with the media, I have come across several instances where there have been attempts to ‘kidnap’ the media. Fake news has often been used as a weapon against dissenting voices. Many journalists including myself, became victims of online harassment and character assassination campaigns.

As an agent of public trust, the responsibility of exposing vice and forgery rests with the media. Unless the media garners strong internal ethics, this purpose cannot be achieved. With a similar intent, I led a legal battle in the Supreme Court, demanding enforcement of a code of conduct for electronic media in 2012. This code of conduct was enforced in 2015.

Journalists and media practitioners put their lives on the line to serve the nation and its citizens, yet they are mostly met

with criticism. In 2012 and 2014 respectively, I was a victim of two assassination attempts. My perseverance to highlight sensitive issues, such as enforced disappearances, often lands me in the eye of the lion. In 2021, I faced a nine months ban for condemning violence against journalists. The unfortunate reality is, that this is not just the story of one journalist: more than 150 journalists and media workers have lost their lives in the line of duty since the last two decades. Hundreds lost jobs just for voicing the truth. Thousands face unannounced censorship. Every second woman journalist in Pakistan is a victim of online harassment. Such an atmosphere of fear limits journalists from working at full throttle, towards development and national prosperity.

The lack of realization on the significance of a free press for a strong democracy remains. There was a glimmer of hope when the Journalist Protection Bill was passed in 2021, but this law has not been implemented.

Pakistan needs ‘rule of law’ not rule by law. Media authorities must operate as independent bodies, without any undue influence. PECA law must be abolished. Newsrooms must be free from all kinds of pressures. Any attempt to ‘kidnap’ the freedom of the media, must be broken.

“ The media performs a number of important social functions in a democracy, such as exposing and helping to control corruption, improving development processes, and informing the public about their rights and democratic entitlements. ”



Liberating the Media through Law Reform

“ While the media in Pakistan is vibrant and promotes democracy in important ways, amending media laws to bring them more fully into line with international standards would liberate the media to do even more. ”



By
Toby Mendel

Executive Director
Centre for Law and
Democracy

Where the local legal environment for the media is in line with international standards, it can provide robust support for the media's role in promoting and sustaining democracy. To understand how this works, we first need to explore what role the media can and should play in terms of supporting democracy. A key feature of a democracy is that public authorities are accountable to the people. This is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 16 calling, in part, for “effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels”. The media, by informing the public about the work of public authorities, and by exposing both their strengths and weaknesses, is a key tool for accountability.

By the same token, the media underpins effective participation, which lies at the very heart of democracy. International law calls not only for elections, but for elections “guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors”.¹ If the public are not informed about the positions of the parties, about their track records, and about expert views on those positions – all areas where the media should play a leading role – voting, even if freely exercised, does not reflect the true will of the people. The media also performs numerous other important social functions in a democracy, such as exposing and thereby helping to control corruption, improving development

processes, including through public engagement in development, and informing the public about their rights and democratic entitlements.

The 1991 UNESCO Windhoek Conference, adopted a Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press.² If we add “free” to “independent” and “pluralistic” (or “diverse”), we have the three key international law principles for a media law environment which can sustain the role of the media in promoting democracy.

Free here refers primarily to the idea that the media are free to disseminate the content they may wish to, subject only to restrictions which are in line with the strict international law three-part test for such restrictions. This test requires restrictions to be set out in law in a clear fashion; to aim to protect national security, public order, public health, public morals or the rights or reputations of others; and to be “necessary” to protect those interests, which involves several elements, including a proportionality or balancing assessment. All of the democratic support functions of the media depend, fairly obviously, on the media being free, especially in the sense of being able to engage in robust criticism of the government, officials, and other powerful actors in society. In practice, the Pakistani media is able to

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 25, adopted 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976, [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_2200A\(XXI\)_civil.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_2200A(XXI)_civil.pdf).
2. UNESDOC Digital Library, “Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press.” Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000090759?posInSet=2&queryId=3aebea3e-fcd3-4925-8e14-af9b9f4ec10d>.



“ The media, by informing the public about the work of public authorities, and by exposing both their strengths and weaknesses, is a key tool for accountability. ”

engage in robust criticism of government, albeit sometimes only by steering carefully around local content restrictions. This is because Pakistan has several content restrictions which go beyond what is permitted under the three-part test, among other things, in the areas of defamation (still criminal in Pakistan), blasphemy, national security and terrorism, and contempt of court.

Independence refers primarily to the idea that the government does not control the media. The importance of this to the media’s ability to sustain democracy is fairly obvious; if the government controls the media, then it will not be able to hold public authorities to account, inform people properly about political matters, or expose corruption. Here again, there are serious challenges in Pakistan. Neither Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (popularly known as Radio Pakistan),³ nor Pakistan Television Corporation,⁴ both public broadcasters, are independent of government. Furthermore, the general broadcast regulator, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA),⁵ also lacks structural independence from government.

Diversity refers to the idea of a wide range of informational perspectives

being available to the people. This can be promoted in different ways, including through rules preventing undue concentration of media ownership, systems for ensuring different types of media – such as public service, commercial and community in the broadcasting area – and the direct promotion of content diversity – such as by requiring broadcasters to carry minimum quotas of news, local content, and content directed at children. Pakistan does have in place rules on concentration of media ownership, both in discrete media sectors (such as television) and between media sectors (such as radio and television), as well as a vibrant media scene in practice. However, Pakistan remains one of the countries where community radio is still not properly recognized in law, while only limited efforts are made to promote content diversity directly.

International law provides very robust protection for an overall legal environment for the media which supports its role in promoting democracy. The media in Pakistan is vibrant and does manage to promote democracy in very important ways. But amending media laws to bring them more fully into line with international standards, would liberate the media to do even more in this area.

“ Pakistan remains one of the countries where community radio is still not properly recognized in law, while only limited efforts are made to promote content diversity directly. ”

3. Federal Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Read further at <http://www.moib.gov.pk/Pages/168/PBC>.

4. Pakistan Television Corporation Limited. Read more at <https://www.rozee.pk/company/pakistan-television-corporation-limited/about/>.

5. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. Read more at <http://www.moib.gov.pk/Pages/178/PEMRA>.

ASSALAM-O-ALAIKUM PAKISTAN

FIM
100
PAKISTAN

24 HOURS RADIO STATION





INTERVIEW

Sarah Lister

Head of Governance
Bureau for Policy and Programme Support
United Nations Development Programme

“ UNDP, together with other partners such as UNESCO, continues to be a strong advocate for media development as a key component of efforts to achieve SDG 16, and all the other Sustainable Development Goals. ”

Has the media played an effective role in driving the development policy agenda? How?

Media actors have an enormous potential to drive development agendas, including of course the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Not only are they critical in providing quality information to ensure that public deliberation is based on evidence; they are also essential in securing truly accountable and responsive governance – not to mention that, especially in fragile contexts, media can play an important role in countering polarization and facilitating the identification of common ground between different segments of society.

We see in many contexts, that this potential largely goes unfulfilled, as media actors struggle to deal with adverse economic shifts, such as the decline of advertising revenue, which undermines their financial viability, as well as restrictive legislation and growing threats to the safety of journalists. This is why UNDP, together with other partners such as UNESCO, continues to be a strong advocate for media development as a key component of efforts to achieve SDG 16-Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and all the other Sustainable Development Goals.

Being an agent of empowerment and inclusion, what role has the media played in reducing inequalities? How can this be improved?

The first way in which media actors can contribute to reducing inequality and promoting the ideal of ‘leaving no one behind’ is by providing facts about disadvantaged, marginalized and people who lack opportunity in a given context. In addition, they can promote inclusive and respectful news coverage to counter the prejudice and distorted perceptions that often accompany discrimination. Media making space for content that is produced by marginalized groups to bring their voices to the forefront, is a powerful narrative.

UNDP has a long history of working in partnership with media actors and different groups of society to address exclusion and inequality. A couple of years ago, we documented various examples of this work – together with other examples of media development initiatives – in a publication entitled “UNDP’s Engagement with the Media for Governance, Sustainable Development and Peace”.¹ We hope that this resource will spur even more interest among Country Offices and partners in what we regard as a critical area of work.

1. UNDP (2019), “UNDP’s Engagement with the Media for Governance, Sustainable Development and Peace.” Available at <https://www.undp.org/publications/undps-engagement-media-governance-sustainable-development-and-peace>



“ Media making space for content that is produced by marginalized groups to bring their voices to the forefront, is a powerful narrative. ”

How is the ‘media for development’ landscape affected by regulatory mechanisms that monitor or control media?

According to major tracking indices, media freedom and freedom of expression have been declining globally for almost a decade. In fact, UNESCO’s 2021/2022 report on “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development”² states that over the past five years, approximately 85 percent of the world’s population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country. To a significant extent, this trend has been driven by regulatory provisions that introduce unwarranted limitations on the work of media, or fail to protect media personnel from intimidation, harassment and violence.

Of course, freedom of expression is not absolute, and clear boundaries are established under international human rights law as in the case of propaganda for war or incitement to violence. However, it is essential that limitations imposed on the work of media be provided for by law, and genuinely necessary, which means – among other things – that they should respond to a pressing public need and be proportionate to their stated aim. Overall, media self-regulation should be encouraged and promoted as a much preferable alternative to intrusive regulation by public authorities.

With ‘digital’ being the new normal, what power does the media occupy in the future, in shaping development outcomes?

This is a very important issue, but also a very complex one, with many different dimensions to it.

There is no question that social media platforms enabled by the digital revolution have changed the information landscape forever. These platforms come with a lot of opportunities (greater access to information, democratization of information flows and public debate), but also, as we know, with many challenges (unprecedented potential for disinformation, hardening of “echo chambers”, private regulation of what is essentially a public domain, and so on). So, the first step is really getting to an in-depth understanding of the impact of large internet platforms on freedom of expression and public deliberation, so that we can have an informed discussion about policy implications. Some UNDP Country Offices have already started to focus on this topic – like our colleagues in Uruguay – but of course this is an issue that goes well beyond national borders.

The other issue is how media will be adapting their business models to a digital world. And here of course, the biggest question is how to balance the imperative of securing sufficient revenues in deeply transformed media markets with the need to preserve journalistic standards, and protect editorial independence. Globally, we are seeing a fair amount of experimentation – some more successful than others – but in many ways, this is a process that is still in the making, and whose outcome remains uncertain. What is important to stress here is that information is not just a simple commodity, but an essential public good.³ For this reason, it is essential that all relevant actors – including of course UNDP and the international community – take the necessary steps to ensure that the conditions for free, independent, and pluralistic media are maintained around the world.

2. UNESCO, “Journalism is a public good: World trends in freedom of expression and media development; Global report 2021/2022.” Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380618?2=null&queryId=0a30ee11-7640-48c0-b1c3-8d7e1e5dc867>

3. UNDP (2021), “Blog: A healthy news media is more critical than ever.” Available at <https://www.undp.org/blog/healthy-news-media-more-critical-ever>

“ A huge challenge in environmental journalism is the limited access to the field for women, as opposed to men. ”

First woman journalist in Pakistan's Khyber district

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The Development Disconnect: Impacts on Environmental Journalism and Beyond

“ In countries like Pakistan, whose development pathways intersect at so many lines, unless the media presents a truly holistic view, the coverage will remain as fractured and disconnected, as is the development space. ”



By

Afia Salam

Journalist

In any society, media is the bridge over which information crosses. It has long been used by citizens as a means of access to the corridors of power, to inform about their needs, complain about service delivery, or obtain information on measures being taken for their benefit.

In the current day and age of rapid, almost real-time information dissemination, it seems odd to still think of the traditional role of the media. However, technological transformation has not altered the true purpose of the media: Inform-Educate-Entertain, and be a watchdog!

This is where observers of the media and media practitioners view the coverage of socio-economic and sustainable development policy issues with a critical lens. This critique extends to the shortcomings due to the challenges of how the media covers environment and climate change.

Pakistan's position on the global vulnerability index is not reflected in the corresponding coverage in the media. Such issues are catapulted to the front page and Op-Eds, in the aftermath of disasters or high profile 'events'.

Impacts of slow onset disasters, or the human face of those disasters, do not make it to the headlines. Dearth of trained media persons has been cited as a reason, but a more pressing one is the lack of resources to reach the field, and

bring in stories that can influence policy.

There are very few independent pools of resources for media persons wanting to do environment and climate change stories, to dip into and head out to the field. They are dependent on the organizations working in the field to either take them there or provide access. Many times, that compromises the independence of the narrative.

Barring a few traditional media houses who can be counted on fingertips, with some left to spare, there are few that provide resources to their staff to obtain stories from the field. Fewer still show the sensitivity to place them up the ladder of importance, by allowing them primetime slots or column spaces that attract attention.

This challenge also has a gender dimension as access to women is generally very limited for male media personnel in the field. Hence, half of the country runs the risk of remaining under the radar, especially because for women media persons who want to pursue the field of environmental reporting, accessing the field in itself is a challenge due to cultural norms.

Another challenge of fact and data driven stories is the general tendency of government officials to hold findings close to the chest, or being unable to share them in a manner that is easy to understand.



Drone Coverage of Camping Pods at Shaheedisar, Gabeen Jabba and Allai.

© UNDP Pakistan

However, whenever these hurdles have been removed, women working in the space of environment and climate change coverage have presented powerful narratives that have influenced policy and legislation. This is very important to allow for a better understanding of the overarching nexus between environment, climate change and sustainable development.

In countries like Pakistan, whose development pathways intersect at so many lines, unless the media presents a truly holistic view, the coverage will remain as fractured and disconnected as is the development space.

The media functions in the space where the drivers of its content are two extremes of State narrative and profitability. The space for public service media or even public media that is not tethered to the aforementioned interest groups, is very small and riven with regulatory tussles.

Even in the development policy and practice space, things are not seen as a whole. The lament of ‘working in silos’ has been done to death, but has not resulted in a demise of the practice.

Thus, it is a challenge for the media to get a comprehensive understanding of issues and make connections between various sectors. This leads to a lack of in-depth coverage, absence of incisive

questions, and critique of the narration presented to them to report on.

The malaise also has to do with the way media departments at various educational institutions are structured. The curriculum leans more towards the type of ‘news’ that garners eyeballs, pandering to the elements of employability and profitability. It too is ensconced in silos, which go by the name of ‘beats.’

Beat reporters rarely get the chance to do deep dives into subjects they are sent out to cover. This is why the new media platforms, that go beyond traditional journalism, have been pushing the envelope. They are covering a broader spectrum of topics and have a different segment of audience that is not satisfied by simplified narratives.

The interactivity afforded by this media means that it is more accountable to its audience as a reaction is almost instant. It also affords it the opportunity to cover any misses, return to a topic with a newer, deeper angle, and get critical analysis.

The democratizing of new media platforms have allowed many to break the shackles and branch out into fields of interest, and then present them with a focus. Thus, now you see many media persons, as well as platforms, focusing

“ There are very few independent pools of resources for media persons wanting to do environment and climate change stories, to dip into and head out to the field. ”



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“ Pakistan’s position on the Global Vulnerability Index is not reflected in the corresponding coverage in the media. Such issues are catapulted to the front page and Op-Eds, in the aftermath of disasters or high profile ‘events’ like Conference of the Parties (COPs). ”

on social issues, economic justice, equitable development, policy critiques and analysis.

It also presents critical regional and global comparisons because of its reach and connections with countries and regions beset with similar development issues. This negates the ‘no can do’ from the implementers, be they the development agencies or the governments, by citing successful apples to apples examples.

One example is of the media providing the lead in cases of disasters and emergencies and the responding agencies moving in the wake of that coverage. This happened during the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, the 2010 floods, the 2015 heatwave in Karachi, among other instances.

The media has a critical and powerful role in projecting the development imperatives of the country. However, it needs inputs by the development sector too by way of constant engagement and capacity building, information sharing, and access to people who can help analyze issues that need to be highlighted.

Alongside that, there needs to be development of an appetite to accept critique from journalists who understand these issues and can ask the right questions, because at the end of the

day, media persons are providing a public service. And the bedrock must be truth and transparency, which in this industry, is not an easily employable quality. This is why independent, new media platforms are overtaking the traditional, or legacy media, as they have greater freedom to frame their own narrative

However, this is the only way to bring forth development narratives. The media must be the voice of the voiceless, and only when the voice travels over that bridge to reach those who are responsible to raise the development profile of the country, will it have served its role.

So maybe, the development sector can invest in creating cohorts of the willing who want to focus on policy analysis, critique, and highlighting the plus and minuses of the work on ground. However, it would need an equal partner i.e., the decision makers and gatekeepers of the media, rather than the field workers, because the decision of what is to reach the public eye is taken at their level. Once they become invested in the need to focus on the development drivers, they will put resources - human and monetary, into building the capacity of their team.



“ The potential of digital to serve as an alternative medium for journalism and activism, has not gone unchallenged. ”

Media Going Digital: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

“ To optimize the potential of digital media in achieving development goals, it is essential to focus on policies that ensure freedom of expression, offer protection of privacy and other digital rights, and prioritize the increase in digital media information literacy, as an urgent goal. ”



By

Asad Baig

Executive Director/Founder,
Media Matters for
Democracy

Founder, Media Lab

Journalist

In the evolutionary journey of media in Pakistan, the 'digital revolution' has been the most significant milestone, and while the convergence of mediums has left a lot to be desired, it is safe to say that it has intrinsically changed the way information is produced and consumed.

The first generation of this digital revolution started with the licensing of private satellite news channels in 2002, an initiative that opened the doors for information exchange on an unprecedented scale. By 2015, a little over a decade later, television became the mass-medium of Pakistan, available to an estimated 134 to 140 million consumers across the country. The private news channels became the key source of news and information for the country, actively consumed by approximately 15 million households, reaching nearly 105 million viewers, well over half of the country's population.

The second generation of the revolution began with improvements in internet access and rise in the popularity of digital platforms for information exchange, which, in a way, fundamentally changed the dynamics of otherwise traditional information exchange, transcending traditional limitations, including geographical boundaries and linear nature of content.

Currently, according to the figures from Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), 110 million Pakistanis have access to mobile internet, and there are currently 113 million traditional broadband subscribers. In other words, well above 50 percent of the population has access to internet.

Statistics collected through various platforms suggest that there are about 46 million social media users in Pakistan, nearly 75 percent of which are between the ages of 18 to 34. Interestingly, this figure only includes subscribers of traditional social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Non-traditional platforms such as Tiktok have an additional user-base, and an estimated 33 million Pakistanis use Tiktok. The growth rate of social media users in the country is nearly 20 percent per year, which means that in the next five years, this figure will potentially double.

The Good

Digital platforms have augmented the reach of traditional platforms, such as linear news channels, allowing them to access a much wider global audience which was not possible through traditional linear television. For instance, the two leading news networks of



“ With low barriers to information creation and access, digital has also attracted a host of users who engage in online harassment and cyber bullying. ”

Pakistan, Geo News and ARY News, maintain a following of 17.3 million and 21.9 million, respectively, on Facebook, and 9.8 million and 7.7 million, respectively, on YouTube. Data extrapolated from the Facebook Page Insights shows that both the pages have a monthly reach of 100 million to 200 million or more, individually.

This ‘digital’ reach has enabled traditional broadcast media outlets to reach a new kind of audience which was previously uninterested in the ‘television’ news; the youth in Pakistan. Considering this potential, all leading traditional media outlets are re-packaging broadcast content for consumption on digital platforms, amplifying their reach manifold.

With the popularity of non-traditional digital platforms, mainly Tiktok, the traditional broadcast media outlets are making their presence known on these platforms, enabling them a direct reach to individuals from all socio-economic backgrounds, mostly the working class.

Geo News, for instance, now has a ‘verified’ account on Tiktok, so does Washington Post, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Tiktok is especially popular in countries with low literacy rates since it allows the users to interact by creating and consuming visual content only, as opposed to writing or reading.

This move of traditional news outlets to digital platforms has also disrupted the orthodox model of information exchange, i.e. a one-way information-stream, flowing down from information producers to information consumers, such as traditional linear television of radio broadcasts. Modern digital platforms have allowed for a much more interactive means of information exchange between the media outlets and the consumers, allowing for instant feedback on content, pushing the outlets to produce more user-centric and demand driven content.

The digital shift has allowed for the democratization of the process of

“ The first generation of this digital revolution started with the licensing of private satellite news channels in 2002, an initiative that opened the doors for information exchange on an unprecedented scale. ”



“ While policies focused on increasing media information literacy are missing, policies to control the digital information space are many. ”

information production and publication, a space which was previously only limited to the big media groups, and through expensive licensing processes. As a result, a number of privately owned and operational digital media and community-based outlets have popped up across the country, producing much more community news content — as opposed to the national outlets — and gardening popularity within the masses, especially in underreported areas, such as Gilgit Baltistan.

Most importantly, what some considered a ‘monopoly’ of big media groups on the publication of information has been broken, and as a result, several journalists are publishing content on digital platforms, such as Youtube and Twitter, without as an association with traditional media groups, which was previously considered a ‘perquisite’ for being a credible journalist. This opening up of information-space has allowed for a much more open, direct, and ‘uncensored’ information exchange, and has drastically changed the media landscape in Pakistan.

The Bad

However, as all things digital, the evolution has happened at a fast pace, leaving the public and policies to catch up with some of the ramifications. In 2016, the World Economic Forum identified misinformation as a challenge that could seriously affect societies. In Pakistan, with more and more connecting to the internet every day, and without the necessary understanding of the digital information space, the challenge of misinformation and disinformation remains significant. Unaware of the mechanics of digital information production, a large segment of the public is easy target for those who spread misinformation for economic or political purposes. The digital ecosystem is rife with various kinds of misinformation which requires a critical engagement from the consumers of information.

In Pakistan, where literacy rates are still low, digital and media information literacy is yet to be prioritized. Thus, a large segment of the public is unable to



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differentiate between authentic information sources and mis/dis information. Resultantly, clickbait economy i.e. diversion of viewers to misleading content by usage of different sensational and emotionally charged tools, is flourishing. With clickbait easily available as competition, digital outlets linked with legacy media have also started creating clickbait.

With low barriers to information creation and access, digital has also attracted a host of users who engage in hate speech and incitement to violence. The harassment of journalists, human rights defenders and political activists online is prevalent. Structured misinformation campaigns, including those that incite violence against individuals and groups, are common.

The Ugly

While policies focused on increasing media information literacy are missing, policies to control the digital information space are many. The potential of digital to serve as an alternative medium for journalism and activism has not gone unchallenged. Unfortunately, consecutive governments have created different legal instruments in a bid to control digital media. In 2016, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, PECA, passed amidst severe criticism by journalists

and activists. Since then, PECA's use to silence journalists has been challenged multiple times in the Islamabad High Court. In 2020, the current government passed rules under Section 37 of PECA, that expand the ambit of digital content regulation. The rules have also been termed draconian by both media and civil society bodies, who have highlighted potential threats to freedom of expression and privacy of internet users. Most recently, an amendment in PECA, passed through an Ordinance, expanded the scope of criminal defamation online.

These laws and policies, enacted without due consideration to protection of fundamental rights and in contrast with international best practices, threaten those who use the digital media for journalism, activism and mobilization, and consequently, limit the true democratic potential of digital media.

In essence, to optimize the potential of digital media in achieving Agenda 2030, it is essential to focus on policies that ensure freedom of expression, offer protection of privacy and other digital rights, and prioritize the increase in digital media information literacy, as an urgent goal.

“ Digital platforms have augmented the reach of traditional platforms, such as linear news channels, allowing them to access a much wider global audience which was not possible through traditional linear television.”





INTERVIEW

Dr. Arslan Khalid

Prime Minister's Focal on Digital Media

“ Digital media is a reality that is here to stay. ”

Has digital media supported social development processes? How?

Digital media has contributed to social development processes in many ways. It has a potential role to play in promoting sustainable and equitable development, which society at large, and vulnerable groups in particular, benefit greatly from. It has promoted equality by giving improved access to virtually every indicator of social development—particularly education, health, and political processes.

Inclusivity is one of the major essences of social development, and there is no denying the fact that digital media has provided an equal opportunity to each strata of society to bypass systematic barriers. Digital fora such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and, Youtube have cemented the value of being entitled to an opinion, and have equipped everyone with journalistic weapons – be it someone abiding in a remote village – to highlight their issues, and create a stir in policy circles.

Dispensation of justice and protection of human rights is one of the key indicators of social development, and digital media does not disappoint in this regard either. We often witness outrage on social media platforms leading to the arrest of high-profile criminals. Digital media has also allowed authorities and political leadership to establish direct contact, and obtain honest and often harsh feedback, from citizens. Twitter spaces are a glaring example of how a common man can now directly interact with the authorities.

Digital media has also financially empowered the common

man, triggering social development at the individual level. Platforms like Youtube allow content creators to create their own content and earn a livelihood without being dependent on any organization. This financial inclusion has cascading effects on overall socio-economic progress.

Social media platforms also play their role in providing an alternate space to underprivileged segments of society, in particular through Tiktok. Villagers with relatively humble backgrounds are well-known celebrities through this platform. A massive shift in social upward mobility can be observed. Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp have also contributed to providing opportunities for smaller and medium businesses, to develop and prosper, by marketing to a wider audience without relying on mainstream media.

How effective has the role of digital media been during emergencies?

It has been highly effective yet goes both ways. During emergencies, digital media not only aids in alerts for crisis preparedness, but also helps institutions in crises management. In the case of natural calamities, social media provides real-time updates through official accounts. For COVID-19, social media platforms were at forefront of quelling rumours, providing accurate information to the masses, and giving hope to billions across the globe. It also highlighted the need for humanity to work collectively, and to stress that collective effort can only be possible through collective sharing of resources as well.

However, digital media is a two-edged sword. Social media has



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“ Inclusivity is one of the major essences of social development, and there is no denying the fact that digital media has provided an equal opportunity to each strata of society, to bypass systematic barriers. ”

made it easier for distortion of facts and mushrooming of fake news, which in turn create panic and unrest. Such an instance was witnessed recently, when ‘news’ broke out regarding a civil war in Karachi. These malicious campaigns are part of hybrid warfare, and we should be playing our part as responsible citizens to counter them using our media tools.

Is new media more effective as compared to old media? Why or why not?

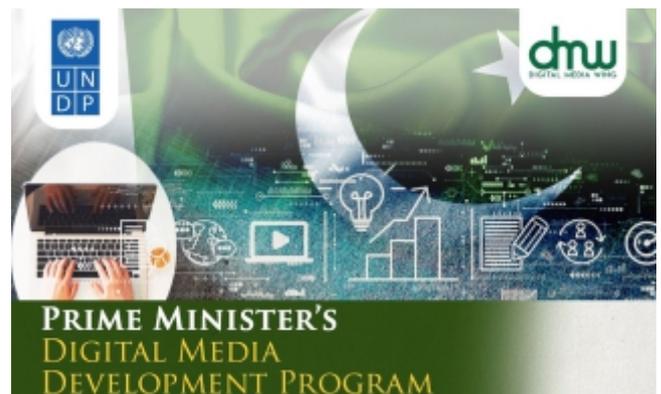
Today, there are 4.62 billion social media users worldwide, accounting for 58.4 percent of the global population. In Pakistan, social media users represent only 31 percent of our population. This highlights the fact that digital media is far from the level of penetration enjoyed by traditional media in Pakistan, hence the reliance on both traditional and digital media is significant, and cannot be understated.

‘New Media’ or digital media as we call it, has the inherent advantage of being deregulated and devolved. The flow of information is fast, fact-checking is swift, and scrutiny by the masses is generally very efficient. Moreover, agenda-setting on digital media is far from easy, as compared to traditional media. Digital media gives relatively equal opportunities to underdogs, to present their narrative.

Having said that, the reach of traditional media is still unmatched, and resources are far greater, but with time, both are gradually merging.

How has media evolved with ‘digital’ being the new normal?

Digital media is a reality that is here to stay. With increased internet access, it will only gain a wider audience. Other forms of media have also started adjusting towards the same. The digital media narrative cannot be shrugged away by mainstream media, while the presence of mainstream media is increasing on digital platforms. Hence, in a way, they both complement each other and with time, their relationship will grow to become one of dependency and support. The only facet that either media must continue to uphold and strengthen, is credibility.





“ To successfully mirror society, media must capture the perspectives, ask the questions, raise the voices, and reflect the experiences of all members of society. ”

Media coverage of transgender protest demanding jobs in Karachi, Pakistan

© Akhtar Soomro/Reuters

Voicing Inclusion

“ For Pakistan to function as a democracy, all its citizens need is to trust their voices will be heard. And this trust can only be built by a truly inclusive media. ”



By

Huma Yusuf

Global Fellow, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

The media is meant to hold a mirror to society, enabling it to objectively appraise itself, and course correct if necessary. To successfully mirror society, media (whether print, broadcast or social) must capture the perspectives, ask the questions, raise the voices, and reflect the experiences of all members of society – across ethnic, religious, linguistic, regional, and class divides.

Media must be inclusive in two ways: by ensuring that all members of a society can access media content so that they are informed, empowered citizens in a democratic context, and more importantly, by creating content that affirms the experience of all members of society.

Sadly, Pakistan’s media fails the inclusion test. Approximately 40 percent of illiterate Pakistanis cannot avail of print media; over 65 percent of Pakistan’s population in rural areas has spotty access to cable television channels and other privatized broadcast media; and 65 percent of Pakistanis are yet to have internet access. Basic access to media content remains a challenge.

Those who can access media content will find that it is not reflective of Pakistan’s diversity. Newsrooms are concentrated in urban areas, drawing members of particular political, socio-economic, and ethno-linguistic groups. Few newsrooms have budgets that

enable grassroots reporting from across the country. And despite the growing popularity of social media over the past two decades, we do not have a culture of citizen journalism with people using digital media to proactively share their stories. This is partly because of the digital divide, and a resulting lack of new media literacy, and partly due to political and security considerations.

Commercial considerations also discourage inclusion. Privately owned media outlets must produce content that drives ratings and attracts advertising. Since people tend to seek their own experiences and revel in the ‘echo chamber’, ratings-hungry content focuses on a particular demographic: urban, middle-class, typically male media consumers with purchasing power. This explains why in 2020, several mainstream news outlets closed their Quetta bureaus, citing commercial reasons, even as the south-western Balochistan province became the site of major economic developments such as China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), security incidents and public protests.

These trends are not unique to Pakistan. But in more sophisticated media ecosystems, public broadcasting or citizen journalism may address the gaps. Pakistan’s media landscape is further skewed by media legislation – itself driven by sensitive political and security dynamics – that actively seeks to



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“ Despite the growing popularity of social media over the past two decades, we do not have a culture of citizen journalism with people using digital media to proactively share their stories. ”

suppress and exclude certain Pakistani voices.

In recent years, laws such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance 2016 and its 2022 amendment, and the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021, have sought to criminalize the critique of Pakistan’s armed forces, intelligence agencies, judiciary, and to a lesser extent, government officials. Such legislation criminalizes dissent, and in effect, excludes the voices of those with grievances against their state. In the Pakistani context, this exclusion has a strong ethno-linguistic, regional and class overlay.

Laws aimed at stemming blasphemy and

other religious offences similarly lead to the exclusion of religious minorities from Pakistan’s media landscape. For example, in 2020, the media regulator cracked down on cable operators distributing channels owned and managed by members of the Ahmadi community; the telecommunications regulator followed suit the following year, banning online apps by the community on the basis that they enabled the religious minority to ‘pose’ as Muslims, which is prohibited by Pakistani law.

For Pakistan to function as a democracy, all its citizens need, is to trust their voices will be heard. And this trust can only be built by a truly inclusive media.



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Famous women in Pakistani media



“ Women do not just bring the difference; they are the difference. ”



Shattering the Glass ‘Wall’: Women in Media

“ It is a joy to see young women reporting from the parliament or the courts, covering some of the biggest hard news stories. The visibility of women has increased by leaps and bounds. And at times, it seems as if we are now equal to men in the field. ”



By
Arifa Noor
Journalist

Some lessons are for life. And this is how I remember a journalism workshop I attended years ago, in which a senior American journalist explained that newsrooms needed women to not think like men, but to ensure a different approach – to news, stories and people. If we needed the women to think just like the men, what would be the point, he asked.

It is a lesson I have carried since, for he made me realize that women, or any minority representation, are not just for the sake of numbers, but to bring diversity in thinking, approach, and ultimately, in the content news organizations produce.

Women do not just bring the difference; they are the difference.

In the industry in Pakistan, we saw this difference at work – when the two mainstream political magazines in the country, Herald and Newsline – were helmed by women journalists Razia Bhatti and Sherry Rehman, changing the way politics was written about at a time when newspapers were coming to terms with the changing press environment after Zia-ul-Haq. Later, Beena Sarwar, who was the founding editor of The News on Sunday, brought readers

the first weekend magazine which confidently covered politics and fashion within its covers, setting standards for weekend reading that no publication has redefined since. (The recent trend of publishing pictures of social gatherings on page after page is a redefinition, the industry could have done without).

In those heady heydays of print media, it seemed women had shattered the glass ceiling for good – at one point, women headed all three of the news’ major stations in Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, though as a colleague pointed out, the glass wall was yet to be shattered. She was referring to the heavy predominance of men in the reporting section while women tended to dominate the editorial positions, senior and junior, especially in the English language.

Over the years, this ‘glass wall’ has also been dismantled, bit by bit. The television industry has led to women gaining considerable visibility in the field, in a way not seen in print. It began with women newsreaders, who were then followed by women anchors who became celebrities as well as respected journalists, and then came the women reporters. It is a joy to see young women reporting from the parliament or the



“ Over the years, the ‘glass wall’ has been dismantled, bit by bit. The television industry has led to women gaining considerable visibility in the field, in a way not seen in print. ”

courts, covering some of the biggest hard news stories, as it is to see women grilling senior politicians and government officials. The visibility of women has increased by leaps and bounds. And at times, it seems as if we are now equal to men in the field.

But television screens always create a distorted picture of reality. The constant images of women holding mikes, reporting from the field and helping discussions in studios, creates the sense of a world where they are visible and flourishing.

But for those of us who were part of the print journey in the 90s and later, we wonder about the women who will be in charge, invisible perhaps, but making decisions about what the viewers see. It was brought home recently when the newspapers carried a small news item about AEMEND (Association of Electronic Media Editors and News Editors) which had just elected its new office bearers and executive committee. The names carried in the news item were of men only. Not entirely their fault because there are few women who have

made it to the positions of bureau chiefs or director news in the news channels. And even the English print, which once provided the space to women in senior positions, is now dominated by men. The few women who hold senior positions are not just few and far between, but also rendered relatively invisible, because attention is focused on those in front of the camera. There is Farzana Ali, the intrepid bureau chief of Aaj Television in Peshawar, and continues to inspire many, and Business





“ In the recent past, we realized the importance of having women in critical positions, even if they were always visible. But now, it seems we have accepted visibility in exchange for ceding decision-making power. Women deserve more and the right of ask for more. We can have it all. ”

Recorder, an eminent publication of economic and business news, is headed by Anjum Ibrahim.

The absence of women from these senior positions is felt in myriad ways.

Perhaps this absence of gender diversity is one reason (among many others), for the repetitive and stagnant nature of the news and programming viewers are subjected to. But of greater concern is also the complete lack of attention paid to this matter. It is not even a point of discussion. When women and the media are discussed, sexual harassment at the workplace is highlighted as are the attacks on vocal women journalists on social media platforms - but little else. But few highlight that sexual harassment will not be addressed properly till more women are present in positions of power and can provide a counterforce to those who want to brush matters under the carpet.

Similarly, women have to be present

when editorial decisions are being taken to ensure ethical and empathetic coverage of cases of violence against women. Would the CCTV footage of Noor Mukaddam have been flashed by channels if the gender of those taking the decision been different? Some of the coverage of the Meesha Shafi-Ali Zafar case should also be seen from this point of view. Opinion pieces or news stories using language or analogies which is derogatory towards women would be discouraged.

The possibilities of what would be are endless. But this is a debate that has disappeared from our media landscape. We are focused on the immediate and little else. This was not always the case; in the recent past, we realized the importance of having women in critical positions, even if they were not always visible. But now, it seems, as if we have accepted visibility in exchange for ceding decision-making power. But women deserve more and the right to ask for more. We can have it all.

“ The absence of women from senior positions in the media is felt in myriad ways. ”



INTERVIEW

Tasneem Ahmar

Founder and Director
Uks Research Center

“ Even today, after more than two decades, changes to how women are reporting and being reported on are only marginal. ”

Does Pakistani media employ gender sensitive reporting?

Ours remains a heavily male-dominated media, mostly being unaware of the gender perspective to journalism and its impact. Moreover, there is a language divide. The English language media appears to be more gender sensitive as compared to Urdu media which, unfortunately, thrives on sexual objectification of women and sensationalist headlines. Likewise, print media appears to fare better than the electronic, especially television channels. And digital media needs to be brought under ethical guidelines to avoid usage of derogatory language or visuals.

As the head of an organization that remains the only one dedicated to monitoring and media analysis (news and entertainment) daily, I can safely say that even today, after more than two decades, changes to how women are reporting and being reported on are only marginal. Being a pioneer in pushing gender-aware content in the media; I can take pride in the increasing instances of women's pictures being carried in affirmative ways in the print media. But sadly, the situation has not improved enough to truthfully report events and incidents in a gender-sensitive manner. Having monitored and analyzed media during COVID-19, it can be said that the cost of the pandemic that women have had to bear - both in terms of not reporting 'reported' crime and of the stories that were left untold - was not effectively communicated by the media.

Do women enjoy equal access and participation in Pakistani media? Why or why not?

Without doubt, the presence of women in the media in Pakistan has increased in number over the past several years. What needs to be researched is whether this increase has been horizontal or vertical. Are women more aware and in control of their agency while working in media houses? What kind of beats, assignments and roles are they assigned? Do they have equal opportunities to professional progress and development as their male colleagues?

From when I started my journey of media training and gender-sensitization, I do see more women anchors and news casters in news channels, but that is where the representation of women in media stops. We still have a very lopsided national and regional media, where women journalists are not part of any newsrooms or reporting cadre. This is ironic as the percentage of women students in media or communication departments in universities across Pakistan, is higher than males, and yet we do not see this percentage joining media houses as professional journalists. There could be many reasons to this disbalance: many families do not find media a preferred profession for women; many media houses still lack women-friendly environment with zero tolerance for workplace/sexual harassment; only one or two media houses have any written gender policies or code-of-ethics; there is discrimination in salary/raises, promotions etc; late working hours is a serious issue with women and many deny or turn-



“ Without doubt, the presence of women in the media in Pakistan has increased in number over the past several years. What needs to be researched is whether this increase has been horizontal or vertical. ”

down promotions and raises; lack or no transport facilities; absence of creches; and finally, lack of separate toilets for women, all add up to women's absence in the media.

What challenges do women media practitioners face?

Many! Being in minority, their voices are often silenced in the herd and their genuine concerns laughed off by industry veterans. The number of women in the media is also linked with how the modern Pakistani woman is portrayed in mainstream media. Being a heavily male-dominated industry, the portrayal is majorly unrealistic and laden with the most misogynistic undertones. This impacts how Pakistani media perceives its women and how it treats them.

Thus, most women in our media face challenges from the day they enter the field. Some overcome these challenges through their inner strength and supportive social circle, but many succumb to the everyday pressures and quit. The challenges include (but are not limited to), the gender insensitive environment, personal remarks, trolls and abusive emails, balancing their home and profession, breaking the glass ceiling, and removing the sticky ground.

What additional measures are required to support women in media?

I would suggest the following affirmative actions be made

mandatory for our media organizations, big and small:

- Increase in gender-sensitivity amongst all practitioners of media;
- Increase in the number of women in the media to promote gender balance in media organizations;
- Increase in the number of women holding key positions in media organizations to break the bias;
- Increase in opportunities available to women in media including training and salary raise;
- Increase positive and sensitised portrayal of women by the media and decrease/eliminate gender insensitive content; and,
- Fill in the gap of mentorship for women journalists. Many young women journalists do not have adequate opportunities to be mentored by their seniors, mostly due to non-availability of women mentors, as their being mentored by their male superiors is more than often, 'gossiped' about.

Enhancing Potential for Effectivity

“ While Sindhi media housed sufficient technical and infrastructural capacities at its onset, there is a need for constant trainings to ensure that the media remains afloat. ”



By

**Ghulam Rasool
Chandio**

Program Director & Director,
Documentaries
Sindh Television Network

The province of Sindh has played an instrumental role in national development. Unfortunately, the people of Sindh have been marginalized politically, socially and in several other sectors. Sindhi Media resonates a similar sentiment.

While Sindhi media housed sufficient technical and infrastructural capacities at its onset, there is a need for constant trainings to ensure that the media remains afloat.

With two decades down, there is a dire need to upgrade. Owing to scarce financial resources and limited support from provincial and federal governments, upgradation of Sindhi media has been limited, to the extent that it is now unable to function to its full potential.

A great part of the media industry depends on financial sponsorships, given either by private companies or the government. However, the provincial media in Sindh has largely been neglected, and not provided with necessary incentives, or moral and financial support, thereby creating a

great impediment to its performance.

To cover a wide range of social, political, and economic scenarios, the Sindhi media has three main arms: Sindh TV - (Entertainment), Sindh TV (News) and the Daily Jeejal Newspaper. Sindh TV (Entertainment) broadcasts dramas, serials and songs, creating awareness on social issues. Sindh TV (News) provides coverage for international, national and provincial news, and events. It also broadcasts talk shows, documentaries and reports which highlight issues and propel debate on political, social, economic, health, and sports fronts. Daily Jeejal is a print media version of these channels. All other Sindhi Channels also operate along similar lines.

Sindhi people possess very strong sentiments about their language, culture, and traditions. The national media fails to pay sufficient attention to these sentiments and their depiction, let alone larger provincial issues. Perhaps such bias is one of the main reasons behind the establishment of Sindhi Media Channels.

Risking Lives for Development

“ Financial, technical and infrastructural investments are requisite to ensure that the media in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can continue to serve the development needs of the region, as well as the country. ”



By

Ashfaq Bangash

Former Bureau Chief, AVT
Khyber
Senior Reporter Islamabad,
Khyber News TV

Media in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa experienced intense economic recession in 2018-19. Hundreds of media workers lost their jobs. Yet, there were some journalists who continued to stay afloat, with their positive attitude towards and their will to fight against all odds. The media crisis in the region prompted journalists to polish their skill set and diversify their capacities.

Since then, social media has taken on an even more significant role for journalists in the province. Establishing their own social media channels has not only helped supplement incomes, but also enhanced engagement and awareness. By employing a multitude of media tools and mediums, these journalists are working at their full potential in uplifting the region through the media.

A big challenge faced by journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa includes feeling trapped between state and non-state actors. Fear for their security is also a big concern. As a result, their exposure to risk is manifold. Moreover, while infrastructure of the big channels is

satisfactory, several smaller media outlets lack even basic infrastructure. Infrastructural investment on this front is important and the need of the hour.

Another investment that the region needs are capacity building trainings. While the region houses exceptional media personnel, times have significantly changed and with it, so have the learning needs of journalists and media practitioners. Regular trainings are requisite to ensure that the media in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can continue to serve the development needs of the region, as well as the country.

With digital being the future, there is no doubt that journalism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has also taken a shift towards that direction. However, even with the free availability of social media, there are several hidden 'behind the scenes' costs and challenges that do not meet the eye. Financial investment and accountability is key to ensuring the full effectiveness and longevity of media in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Battling Fear of the Unknown

Pakistan's first Sikh news anchor, narrates his media journey

“ I take my job in the media as a responsibility towards Pakistan, the country that has made me who I am. ”



Prior to joining mainstream media, I was extremely active on social media. I would often upload content and receive a lot of engagement from my followers. I knew I was a 'media' person long before I formally joined television.

A few years ago, while visiting Malaysia, I visited a Sikh temple. Being clean shaved which was unusual for a Sikh man, I was questioned by some elders on my origins. When they found out I was from Pakistan, they appeared visibly concerned for my wellbeing. However, I laid all their fears and presumptions to rest when I assured them of my positive

and caring treatment in Pakistan. They were certainly surprised, to say the least. It was then and there, that I vowed and then prayed that if given an opportunity, I would want to set an example to emphasize how the Sikh community abides peacefully and happily in Pakistan.

Thereafter, I returned to Pakistan and was in search for employment. It was during this time, that a television producer saw my picture on social media and asked me to get in touch. I went in and gave an audition.

As narrated by
Harmeet Singh





“ I owe a lot to Pakistan’s media in granting me so much national and international acclaim, and a positive rapport. ”

A week passed. I received an offer for employment, outside the media. Simultaneously, news broke that Pakistan had hired a Sikh as an anchor. This wasn’t true, yet.

On hearing this news, I was contacted by the producer I had earlier auditioned for. Hiring me would be a huge risk, but one he was willing to take. While I did have some media exposure with a slight family background in media, I was largely untrained and unaware of how the media worked.

While there is no doubt that the Sikh community is treated extremely well in Pakistan, there still exist a multitude of challenges. One of them is limited freedom of expression. We still struggle to speak up on certain fronts, owing to fear of backlash. Being a prominent member of the Sikh community, I have received several death threats, but I am resolute on staying strong and fulfilling my responsibility towards my homeland, Pakistan.

The media industry is a business industry. You must constantly perform because you are easily replaceable. I have worked very hard and took on several minor media jobs in between, before I made a breakthrough, but I owe a lot to my mentors in television, who trained and nurtured me, and supported me in every challenge I encountered.

Though there are Sikhs working in every sector in the country, their engagement in mainstream Pakistani media brings with it a lot of sensitivity. I owe a lot to Pakistan’s media in granting me so much national and international acclaim, and a positive rapport. I have never once regretted my decision.

However, as with everything, there are several reformations needed to further support the Sikh community in Pakistan. Forced conversions must stop, right to vote should be granted and minorities’ freedom of expression must be improved. But most importantly, the education curriculum needs to be revised to include religious education for Sikhs. Only if the foundations are strengthened, can the building weather all storms.

Nevertheless, I feel I am blessed. Blessed to be able to enjoy such healthy and happy coexistence in Pakistan. Blessed to have been given the opportunity to portray a positive image of how Sikhs are treated in Pakistan, across the world. Blessed to be able to forge a name for myself, that will remain forever, even after I die. I take my job in the media as a responsibility towards Pakistan, the country that has made me who I am.

“ The media industry is a business industry. You must constantly perform because you are easily replaceable. ”

Marking Territory

Pakistan's first transgender news anchor narrates her media journey

“ Using the media as a tool to further rights-based development has been my aim all along. ”



As narrated by
Marvia Malik

As the first global transwoman news anchor, I have seen my share of difficulties. In addition to being a media anchor, I am also actively engaged at the national level in upholding the rights of the transgender community, through my membership in the National Youth Council, the Kamyab Jawan Program, and as President of the Khawaja Sira Society (KSS), that works for the uplift of legal rights of the transgender community in education and health..

My official media journey began with Kohinoor TV. I worked tirelessly to establish a place for myself in the media because I wanted to do something worthwhile for my community. Belonging to a marginalized community taught me the significance of having an opportunity to voice the voiceless.

Thereafter, I used the media platform to highlight the rights of the transgender community and brought their issues to the forefront to spur activity and address

disenfranchisement. I think the last three to four years has allowed for greater acceptance of the transgender community, which could not have been possible without the media.

Using the media as a tool to further rights-based development has been my aim all along. Transgenders are now issued national identity cards and possess the right to vote, along with several other legal rights. I now desire to see a seat in the parliament for transgenders, so the community can be well represented.

The future holds limitless potential. I can very well envision transgenders establishing themselves in all fields in the future. As far as the media is concerned, I strongly urge transgenders to acquire sound media education and understanding before entering the field, as is the case with all fields. I can vouch that the future for transgenders is bright and positive.

“ I think the last three to four years have allowed for greater acceptance of the transgender community, which could not have been possible without the media. ”





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