

Role of Media amidst COVID-19 Outbreak: From Pakistan and Beyond

Media is always seen as the primary point-of-contact for information in all pandemics and disasters, as media professionals are sometimes the very first to reach a scene and report what they witness so as to inform and educate people about an incident. Soon after the COVID-19 outbreak, media across the world, including Pakistan, informed people about the severity, sensitivity and seriousness of the pandemic and how people can protect themselves from the Coronavirus. From United Nations reporting to the local channels of information, every media outlet played a very responsible and sensible role in information dissemination.

While the traditional media (both print and electronic), under their ethical standards, objectively report day-to-day situations and cases, some media outlets, in a bid to take lead in the existing 24/7 breaking news race, have also misreported incidences of the pandemic causing panic and fear among the general citizenry. Social media, however, is blamed for misreporting or spreading what is known as 'fake news' or disinformation in this regard.

In today's world of Information and Technology, media space is supposed to be paramount in the context of awareness raising. Media's responsibility increases with the incidence of spread of any pandemic or disaster as most see the media as the only source of authentic information. If they are misled, then misinformation may cause to them a double disaster. That is why there is a need to analyse the role of the media (i.e. print, electronic and social) in different perspectives and contexts from the COVID-19 outbreak to the lockdowns and post-lockdown situations.

The following questions will be deliberated upon in detail at this panel discussion:

- What role has the media played since the outbreak of COVID-19 to-date in information dissemination?
- Did some media channels resort to politicisation of the situation and spread fake news?
- Was media portrayal of the COVID-19 pandemic's spread and information regarding protective measures backed by pure medical advice or otherwise?
- Did media messaging of the pandemic cater for the technical/medical information needs of the public?
- Did media reporting lead to those who really needed and deserved humanitarian assistance?
- What challenges has the media had to face during and after the pandemic in performing its functions?
- What should media professionals do in the future to make their reporting systems credible?

Panel Organisers

Mr Saleem Khilji, Director SDTV/ English Editor, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: khilji@sdpi.org

Dr Shafqat Munir, Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: shafqat@sdpi.org

Mr Muhammad Awais Umar, Research Assistant, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: awais@sdpi.org